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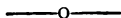


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LOST—A PEARLE.

A Novel

BY

MRS. GEORGIE SHELTON,

AUTHOR OF

"BROWNIE'S TRIUMPH," "THE FORSAKEN BRIDE,"
"EARLE WAYNE'S NOBILITY," ETC.

"Woman may err, woman may give her mind
To evil thoughts, and lose her pure estate;
But for one woman who affronts her kind
By wicked passions and remorseless hate,
A thousand make amends in age and youth,
By heavenly pity, by sweet sympathy,
By patient kindness, by enduring truth,
By love, supremest in adversity."



NEW YORK:

G. W. Carleton & Co., Publishers.

STREET & SMITH, NEW YORK WEEKLY.

MDCCCLXXXIII.

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OF THE
NEW YORK WEEKLY,
THE LEADING STORY AND SKETCH PAPER OF THE AGE.

To
THE READERS OF THE
NEW YORK WEEKLY,
WHO, FOR NEARLY TWENTY YEARS, HAVE STOOD FAITHFULLY BY
US, CHEERING US IN OUR LABORS, AND BIDDING US GOD-SPEED;
TO WHOM OUR PET JOURNAL HAS BECOME A HOUSEHOLD
WORD, AND WITHOUT WHOSE AID WE COULD
HAVE ACCOMPLISHED NOTHING, THIS
VOLUME IS RESPECTFULLY
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CONTENTS.

| CHAPTER. | PAGE. |
|-----------------------------------|-------|
| I.—A Strange Proceeding..... | 9 |
| II.—A Fatal Resolution..... | 18 |
| III.—“I Shall Yet Win.”..... | 30 |
| IV.—Cowardly Revenge..... | 40 |
| V.—“I Cannot Believe You.”..... | 51 |
| VI.—“How Can I Save Him?”..... | 63 |
| VII.—Pearle’s Prayer..... | 73 |
| VIII.—Linden Grange..... | 81 |
| IX.—Words of Warning..... | 91 |
| X.—What Pearle Saw..... | 102 |
| XI.—The Wedding Day..... | 110 |
| XII.—Villainy Unveiled..... | 124 |
| XIII.—“Good-by Forever!”..... | 139 |
| XIV.—Baffled..... | 148 |
| XV.—Good-by to the Old Life..... | 157 |
| XVI.—“How Came She Here?”..... | 165 |
| XVII.—Visitors at the Morgue..... | 176 |
| XVIII.—Service Hunting..... | 185 |
| XIX.—Pearle’s Charge..... | 199 |
| XX.—Winning A Victory..... | 211 |
| XXI.—Pearle Dismayed..... | 222 |
| XXII.—The Picture..... | 233 |
| XXIII.—Homeless..... | 244 |
| XXIV.—The Strange Mystery..... | 253 |

CONTENTS.

| CHAPTER. | PAGE. |
|--|-------|
| XXV.—A Child's Instinct..... | 263 |
| XXVI.—“You Are Not Married?”..... | 271 |
| XXVII.—Pearle Maintains Her Dignity..... | 284 |
| XXVIII.—No Signs of the Enemy..... | 294 |
| XXIX.—The Two Friends..... | 302 |
| XXX.—A Fruitless Quest..... | 315 |
| XXXI.—The Marriage Record..... | 326 |
| XXXII.—A Sudden Shock..... | 333 |
| XXXIII.—A Cry for Help..... | 344 |
| XXXIV.—A Dream Dispelled..... | 353 |
| XXXV.—The Bird Flown..... | 365 |
| XXXVI.—Providential..... | 374 |
| XXXVII.—Lady Fennelsea Surprised..... | 386 |
| XXXVIII.—Timely Help..... | 397 |
| XXXIX.—Unraveling the Mystery..... | 406 |
| XL.—The Doctor's Story..... | 416 |
| XLI.—Dr. Murdock's Love for Alice..... | 426 |
| XLII.—“Fire! Help!”..... | 439 |
| XLIII.—“Blessed Tidings.”... .. | 453 |
| XLIV.—Face to Face..... | 463 |
| XLV.—“I Thought She Was Dead.”..... | 477 |
| XLVI.—Avenged..... | 487 |
| XLVII.—A Fearful Retribution..... | 497 |
| XLVIII.—Forgiveness Brings Peace..... | 519 |
| XLIX.—New-Born Hopes..... | 521 |
| L.—Pearle's Happiness..... | 530 |

LOST—A PEARLE.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGE PROCEEDING.

An ancient, moss-growing, ivy-mantled church in the town of Leicester, Leicestershire, England, was filled to its utmost capacity one bright, perfect morning in October, not a hundred years ago.

The gayly and richly dressed crowd had been pouring through the wide-open doors for more than an hour, filling its pews, aisles, and galleries. All the *elite* and aristocracy of the country for miles around had come to do honor to the bridal of the acknowledged beauty and favorite of the county.

Miss Margaret Radcliffe—or, more familiarly speaking, bright, beautiful Pearle Radcliffe—was going to be married, and this golden-crowned, crimson, and amber-tinted October morning was her wedding-day.

Every face within that great church was eager and bright with expectation; every heart beat high with anticipation and pleasure; for it was accounted no small honor to be deemed worthy to attend the bridal ceremony of a member of the noble house of Derwentwater; and doubly honored

were those who had been so happy as to receive cards to the magnificent wedding breakfast that was to follow.

The Radcliffes were one of the oldest and most respected families in all the county. Allstone Radcliffe, the bride-elect's brother, was the fifth Earl of Derwentwater. They were very wealthy, cultivated, and refined; and the beautiful Margaret herself was heiress to a large property that had descended to her from both her mother and grandmother.

"She will look lovely," Sara Fairhaven, the rector's daughter, whispered confidently to her friend, Miss Emily Dolbarre, who, being a visitor at the parsonage, had been permitted to come and view the ceremony. "Her dress is perfectly elegant, her veil three yards long, and so fine and fleecy, and the wreath is superb."

"And is the groom as attractive as the bride?" asked Miss Emily.

"Oh, every bit. Every one admires Captain Byrnholm. They make a very handsome couple."

"*Captain* Byrnholm! Is he in the army?"

"Yes—or he has been. He has lately resigned his commission, and intends to settle down as a country gentleman upon their return from their tour."

"It was a love-match, you say?" pursued Miss Emily, who was deeply interested in the characters connected with this grand wedding.

"Oh, purely; and they have known each other from childhood, although Captain Byrnholm was away attending to his education for several years, and the engagement is not of such very long standing; but they seem perfectly devoted to each other," explained the rector's vivacious daughter.

"What makes you look so dreadfully sober, Emily?"

she asked, after quite a protracted silence on that young lady's part, and noticing that her face was troubled and overcast.

"I do not know. I have experienced a very strange feeling ever since coming into the church—a sort of dread as of some impending evil. Is the building safe? See how crowded it is;" and the young lady glanced uneasily around upon the multitude.

"Safe? you little goose!" laughed her friend, under her breath. "Of course it is perfectly safe. Why, it could no more be moved or stirred from its foundation than one of the 'eternal hills,' though I must confess that I never saw so many people in it at once before."

"I suppose it was a foolish notion; but I feel something now as I do in a terrific thunderstorm—as if some bolt was about to fall and crush us all. The shivers have been running up and down my back for the last half-hour;" and Miss Emily emphasized her words with a visible shudder.

"It is the excitement of the occasion," said Miss Sara, lightly. "We do not often have the pleasure of attending such a grand wedding—hush! Did you not hear some confusion in the vestibule?"

"Yes; I think the bridal party must have arrived."

The minute-hand of the great clock pointed to the hour appointed for the ceremony to occur. There was a suspicious rustle outside in the vestibule, then a few low-muttered sentences, with something of noise and confusion. Eager, expectant faces, bright, restless eyes, and listening attitudes, all bespoke the unusual interest which every one experienced in the approaching event.

The rich tones of the great organ thrilled the vaulted space, seeming to speak, beneath the skillful fingers of the

organist, of a maiden's love, tender and true—of a good man's devotion, and of two pure lives about to blend into one.

A door at the rear of the church was swung open, and every eye was eager for the first look at the distinguished bridal party.

Slowly, and with an ominous tread, it swept up the aisle. Immediately there was a strange flutter among the assembled multitude. Low exclamations of surprise and dismay could be detected in every part of the great building; the bright faces grew pale, the eager eyes anxious and perplexed. Never was an English wedding so conducted before. What could this strange thing mean?

"Where is Captain Byrnholm? He should have been here before this. Where is Allstone Radcliffe, the brother of the bride? *He* should have given her away, instead of that stranger upon whose arm she is leaning. Who can he be, and what means that evil light of triumph that gleams in his eye? and why do the bride-maids and their attendants look so pale and troubled?"

Such were some of the whispered ejaculations that followed the entrance of the wedding party, while no one seemed to comprehend the meaning of the strange scene being enacted before them.

"Why is the bride so pale and deathly?" asked Emily Dolbarre of her friend.

But Sara Fairhaven did not seem to hear her. She was leaning forward, her whole attention concentrated upon the singular scene before her.

"Why does everybody look so startled and dismayed?" her friend persisted. "The bride looks wretched, not happy, as she should do; the friends seem dazed and miserable, as if some sudden calamity had overtaken them;

and I do not think Captain Byrnholm fine-looking at all—he is exceedingly repulsive to me. Do tell me, Sara, what all this means?”

“I am sure I do not know,” the rector’s daughter gasped. “That is not Captain Byrnholm at all, but a stranger who has been visiting him of late. The groom is not here at all, and the whole party look as if they had come to attend a funeral instead of a wedding.”

The strange group had passed up the aisle and now stood before the rector, who was waiting to receive them, but who now also seemed stricken with a sudden panic, and almost paralyzed with astonishment and uncertainty as to what was expected of him.

The bride appeared like a person being led to the scaffold. Her face was as colorless as her spotless robe, and there were tense drawn lines of agony about her beautiful mouth which no one had ever seen there before; while her eyes had in them the wild stare of a person on the brink of insanity.

Her companion was a tall, well-formed man of perhaps thirty years. His head was massive, but crowned with a heavy growth of yellow hair that had a tinge of dull red in it. His features were somewhat large and coarse, and there was a curve to his chin, a set look about his mouth, that betrayed an indomitable will and a cruel nature. His eyes were a reddish-brown—vicious-looking eyes, like those of some repulsive reptile—and they gleamed at this moment with a singular triumphant expression and a fierceness of purpose that made him positively hideous.

The bride’s hand rested upon his arm, where he had seized it, and held it as if to force it to lie in its place.

The bride-maids and others of the party, with pale faces and affrighted looks, followed at a distance.

As they stopped before the altar-railing, the rector turned from one to another as if seeking an explanation, and a death-like hush had fallen upon every one present.

The groom for a moment released his iron grip upon the bride's hand, and hastily pulling a folded paper from his bosom, he thrust it into the clergyman's hands, and in low, authoritative tones commanded him to proceed.

The rector examined the document carefully. It was evidently all right, but that fact seemed to render him more helpless than before, and he stood staring blankly into those two faces before him—one so dear, the other so strange.

To an observer, it would have seemed as if every individual in that vast place had been petrified—suddenly transformed, as it were, from living, breathing humanity to lifeless, soulless statues. There was not a sound, scarce a breath, to stir the atmosphere. Every heart seemingly stood still, waiting, in a sort of horrible fascination, for what should come next.

“Proceed!” again commanded the bridegroom, this time in tones that penetrated the utmost corner of the church.

The trembling rector could but obey, though he evidently shrank from the duty with abhorrence.

He had known the fair bride since her earliest childhood, when he had been summoned to her dying mother, and had called her to him, taken her upon his knees, and taught her the answer to the first question of the catechism. He had watched her budding into girlhood, developing into womanhood, and she had become to him almost like an own dear daughter.

He had known of her betrothal to Captain Byrnholm, a young man whom he sincerely honored and respected;

and he had rejoiced in their mutual happiness, and blessed them both when told of it. He had come there to-day to pronounce over them the words which would make them husband and wife, and to bless a union which gave promise of so much joy and brightness in the future.

One look at the man who led that fair girl to the altar, one look into that frozen, agonized face behind that misty veil, had told him that something was wrong—dreadfully wrong.

The expected groom had not made his appearance; the Earl of Derwentwater, Pearle's natural guardian and protector, was not present—what could it all mean?

But the license which the strange bridegroom had given him was all correct. There were the names of the parties, and the marriage intentions, all plainly written and properly signed. The parties themselves had come at the appointed hour to have the ceremony performed; and, notwithstanding his utter discomfiture and the many fears which beset his heart, he was compelled to go on with the solemn rite.

More than once his tender heart failed him; more than once he stammered, and hesitated, and faltered over the beautiful service; it seemed such a wanton mockery to him, when he knew that fair girl's heart was given irrevocably to another.

When he came to that solemn charge, "If any here present know aught why these two should not be made one, let them now speak, or forever hold their peace," he had waited longer than usual—waited so long that his own daughter Sara, sitting there, with her blanched face and wildly beating heart, felt as if she must shriek aloud, from the pain which thrilled every sensitive nerve in her body. He, that good old man, had waited, hoping, with some-

thing like despair at his heart, that some one *would* speak, and save the girl whom he regarded with such tender affection from the unholy sacrifice.

But no word, no sound disturbed the death-like hush. The bride's pale lips alone parted, as if she would have uttered a protest had she dared; an icy shiver shook her slight frame, and then a dull despair settled in her eyes.

The moment passed, the fatal bond was pronounced irrevocable, and a stranger bore away the bride who should have gone out from that church the wife of Richard Byrnholm.

One remarkable feature of the ceremony had been that the groom uttered all the responses in clear, firm, and somewhat triumphant tones; while the bride, on the contrary, when addressed, uttered no word, gave no sign even that she heard, but stood motionless as a statue, that wild, insane stare still in her eyes.

What could such a strange proceeding mean?

For several moments after the bridal party had passed out, that transfixed crowd seemed to have no power to move. The organist forgot the duty required of him, and sat staring blankly at the spot where the bride had stood, and thus no gay wedding-march—that elaborate composition over which he had spent so much time and patience—broke the spell which seemed to pervade the place, or joyfully proclaimed the union complete.

The clock in the church tower struck twelve, and its heavy, measured tones served to startle into action once more the benumbed faculties of the multitude. The crowd arose and poured from the place, every man asking of his neighbor an explanation of that mysterious marriage—that unholy farce.

"What does it all mean?" asked Emily Dolbarre, excitedly, and trembling with nervousness.

"I don't know. *Pearle Radcliffe has been married to the wrong man!* and what my father could have been thinking of to do it, is more than I can tell;" and the overwrought girl burst into a passion of tears.

"*Married to the wrong man!* I never heard of such a thing; and yet she must have been willing, or she would never have gone to the altar with him," returned her friend, in astonishment.

"I know; but there must be something dreadful about it, to have made her do it. Perhaps—oh! I don't know *what* to think. Pearle looked as if she was ready to die herself; and that hateful, *hateful* man, so proud and triumphant!"

Miss Sara was getting very much excited, almost hysterical.

"Who is he?"

"His name is as horrid as his face—Adison Cheetham," she said, with an accent of scorn. "I was introduced to him at a lawn party a fortnight ago. He has been visiting Captain Byrnholm; is—*was*—a friend of his; but how he managed to steal his bride from him, is more than my limited faculties can comprehend."

"What an adventure! I told you, Sara, I felt as if some bolt was about to fall and crush us all—it has come!" said Emily Dolbarre, with a shudder.

"I feel as if *I* had been crushed. But, oh! how must that bride feel! And poor Captain Byrnholm—how will he bear it? He idolized Pearle Radcliffe. What can it mean?"

And those words were echoed, repeated, and re-repeated

during all that day, and for many days, and there was no one able to solve the mystery.

CHAPTER II.

A FATAL RESOLUTION.

In order to interpret our first chapter, we must take a backward glance, and describe a few thrilling events which occurred during the space of a few days immediately preceding the wedding just described.

Upon a balcony just outside a brilliantly lighted room in a stately mansion, there might have been seen, one lovely moonlight night, a pair of lovers in earnest conversation.

"Only three days more, my Pearle, and then I need 'hope' no longer, for you will be mine for so long as we both shall live. Dearest, I can never tell you of all the bright plans that I have woven for our future. The prospect fairly dazzles me sometimes, to think that I have won so fair a bride, and to know that her heart is all my own. Pearle, my darling, do *you* realize it? Are you *glad* that you are to be my wife?"

The moon shone brightly upon the impassioned speaker, a fine-looking young man of twenty-five. He was of medium height, with a powerful, nobly-proportioned frame, a finely developed head, set squarely and proudly upon a pair of stalwart shoulders. The moonbeams played lightly over his broad, white forehead, from which rich masses of soft, curling black hair were brushed carelessly away.

Dark, fathomless eyes, of wondrous beauty and expression, beamed from beneath the shapely brow, while a goodly shaped nose, and a pleasant mouth, about which tenderness and firmness contended for supremacy, made up the remainder of the profile.

It was such a good, true face—aside from its manly beauty—it was a trustworthy face; and just at this moment it was full of an earnest, tender passion, betraying that his whole life was bound up in the fair girl who was so soon to be his wife.

She was a trifle below him in stature, yet of queenly presence and magnificent beauty. That beauty, however, did not consist of the stereotyped style of either classical or regular features.

Her eyes—beautiful eyes they were, too—were a decided gray, and large, as was also her mouth; but both were capable of such charming expression that no man ever thought to criticise their dimensions. Her nose was straight, and of aristocratic mold; her complexion without a blemish, and the abundant chestnut hair which crowned her intelligent forehead, and always arranged with dainty care, was a perfect delight to look upon.

But the character—which is more than beauty—that was written upon Pearle Radcliffe's pure face, was its chief charm. Before it strong men had bowed and owned her their queen, while her own sex would have been willing to sacrifice half their birthright to have possessed the peculiar powers of fascination that were hers.

"Yes, Richard," she replied to her lover's question, "I am glad that I am to be your wife—*so* glad that I am dumb with my happiness—*so blessed* that it seems to me there can be no other woman whose measure of joy is equal to mine. And yet——"

"Heart's dearest!" he interrupted, reproachfully, hurt that she should qualify her statement in the least.

He laid her two soft hands together, and folding his own over them, drew her toward him, while he searched the dear face with intense earnestness.

"And yet," she repeated, taking up the sentence again, and with a shy resoluteness, as if determined that he should know all that was in her heart, though she shivered slightly, "I have been strangely oppressed to-day with a sense of impending evil. I have felt something of what Damocles must have experienced as he sat at the banquet with that naked sword suspended above his head by a single hair. It seems as if it would take but the slightest breath to send all our beautiful air-castles crashing down upon us, burying us in their ruins."

The strong arms of her lover gathered her close to his manly breast at these ominous words, and his tender lips touched her white forehead re-assuringly.

"'Air-castles,' love! Who has been building 'air-castles?' Not you and I, surely. Our hopes and plans are much more substantial than the light structures you mention," he said, lightly; then added, with fond solicitude: "My darling, the excitement of the past few weeks has been too much for you—you are nervous. You must rest for the next three days, for no shadow must cloud the face of my bride. Now I will send you away; I have kept you longer than I ought in the night air, my love, my almost wife. Earth does not hold a man so blessed as I am to-night, nor a woman more tenderly beloved."

He would have released her, but she clung to him, and he could feel the thrill of pain which quivered through every nerve of her being, and wondered at it.

Involuntarily he clasped her closer, as if thus to testify to his power to shield her from every ill of life.

"Still superstitious, beloved?" he asked, smiling fondly into the uplifted eyes.

"I suppose I am very, very foolish, Richard, and I can assign no reason for the feeling; but indeed I am terribly and inexplicably oppressed," she said, sadly.

"You will forget it all, my own, when the morrow breaks. You will, of course, attend the morning concert in town?" he asked, to change the subject.

"Ye-s; will you come to go with me?"

"I am sorry, but I cannot, as I have an engagement at that hour. I will send our friend to escort you, and I will join you before the concert is over."

Again he felt that thrill of pain through all her being.

"*'Our friend!'*" she repeated. "Yes, I suppose your friends *should* be mine also; but, frankly, Richard, I do not like this Mr.—Cheetham. The name itself is sufficient to repel any one."

"Not like Adison, Pearle! What can you be thinking of? He is the soul of goodness, and would share his last crust with me. I know his name has not the pleasantest sound in the world; but '*what's in a name?*'" he asked, with a laugh.

"I do not like to speak desparagingly of your friend, Richard, but you know I have no secrets from you, and I believe this man is untrue to you. There is something insincere and sinister about his eyes when they rest upon you and you do not observe him. I wish he would go away. There is a feeling of restraint and embarrassment upon me continually when in his presence," the young girl replied, in a troubled tone.

"My peerless Pearle, what has come over you to make

you so suspicious?" returned the young man, in grieved surprise. "Adison Cheetham was my most intimate friend during all my school life; and although he is some years older than I, yet I have been from the first day of our acquaintance his chosen associate. Had I a lesson unusually difficult, he was never too busy to explain it to me, even though he was pressed for time by the harder studies of an advanced form. If I got into trouble, he was always the one who helped me out of it. He helped me to my position and commission in the army through the influence of a friend. He has been interested in all that has interested me, and was first and foremost in his congratulations when notified of our engagement and approaching marriage. Really, Pearle, I am exceedingly disappointed that you do not like him."

"Have you ever done anything to offend him?" Pearle asked, without appearing to heed his last words.

"No; we never clashed in any way, excepting once——"

"Ah! once. Tell me about it," his betrothed interrupted, with a slight start.

"You know that at college," he began, "we have prizes and degrees awarded at the end of every term for scholarship and the excellence of our themes. I was very ambitious during my first year at school. I improved my time to the utmost, and at the beginning of my second year I was advanced a whole form, in which there were lads much older than I—Adison among them. This so elated me that I secretly resolved to try for the prize offered for the best theme at the end of the new year, and which was to be in verse. I won it, and Ad was most bitterly disappointed. He had heretofore stood at the head of the class, and felt reasonably sure of it, and did not dream that I was putting forth every effort as a competitor, as it

was only my first year in that form ; but poetry always came naturally to me, and on the last day of the term, when my name was read as the victor, the fact seemed to smite him like a thunderbolt. He was fearfully angry at first, but his friendship conquered, and he finally turned it off with a laugh, saying, 'Never mind ; we'll make this thing even some other time.' He thinks you are perfect," Richard added, drawing his arm closer around her, "and only to-day said, in a laughing way, that he was more than half tempted to try and win my charming bride away from me."

"Did he say that? Did Adison Cheetham dare say that?" demanded Pearle Radcliffe, with a haughty uplifting of her proud head, while her eyes burned, and her tones trembled with indignation.

Her lover laughed softly.

"Spare your wrath, my darling," he said ; "he was only jesting. Of course he well knows that neither he nor any other living man can win my love from me. Only his admiration for you led him into that extravagant form of speech."

Pearle shuddered.

"I am *afraid* of him," she whispered, nestling closer within the strong arm that held her, and longing to tell him something she dare not.

"I am extremely sorry, dear, that you have conceived this dislike for him," Richard Byrnholm said, with deep regret ; "but, for my sake, try and conceal your feelings. It will only be for a few days, and then we shall have nothing to mar our happiness."

"I will try, Richard. Forgive me if I have wounded you ; but the feeling has been so strong upon me that I

could not control it," the fair girl said, repenting of what she had told him as she saw how it had hurt him.

"And will you allow him to attend you to the concert to-morrow? I have already asked him to escort you."

Pearle's heart sank at the request, and she grew cold as ice; but she could not refuse to grant his petition, and replied, though with some reluctance :

"Yes—if you wish it."

"Thank you; I do, as long as it has been mentioned. And now good-night, sweet. I hope by to-morrow all your gloomy fears and presentiments will have disappeared."

Richard Byrnholm bent down and pressed a fond caress upon her lips, when, with a sigh that was almost a sob, Pearle threw her arms around his neck and returned it passionately, even wildly; then breaking from his embrace, she glided swiftly into the house, leaving him alone and deeply troubled by her strange manner.

"What can trouble her so?" he asked himself, as, with anxious brow, he sprang lightly over the low railing of the balcony and turned toward his own home. "I have never seen her composure so disturbed over anything before; and to think she should be so unjustly suspicious of my dearest friend! I must not monopolize her so much during the few days that remain. She must see more of him, and discover how unfounded is her dislike."

Ah, Richard Byrnholm, when you made that resolution you consigned the gentle dove to the cruel talons of a hawk!

* * * * *

A word regarding the three characters mentioned.

Margaret Radcliffe—Pearle being a pet name, bestowed upon her when a child—was the second daughter of the fourth Earl of Derwentwater. She was an orphan, and

alone in the world, aside from her only brother, in whose care she had been left at her father's death, which had occurred some five or six years before our story opens. Allstone Radcliffe, the fifth Earl of Derwentwater, was several years older than his sister, to whom he was most devotedly attached, while she had been like a bright gleam of sunshine in his home ever since their father's death. He had a lovely wife and three beautiful children, with whom the fair girl was also a peculiar favorite. She had, as has been before stated, a large fortune in her own right; but with all the distinction attendant upon great wealth and a high social position, she had a warm, generous heart, that made her beloved by all who knew her.

Richard Byrnholm was a young man of great promise, and also of excellent family and large wealth. He had, contrary to the wishes of his friends, been desirous of entering the army after completing his education. He possessed great energy and decision of character, and had acquired besides a sort of sentimental desire to distinguish himself in some way. Speaking of this one day to his friend, Adison Cheetham, the latter had suggested the army, and offered to assist in procuring him a commission. Richard had been instantly fired with enthusiasm, and having plenty of money at his disposal, a captain's commission was not long in forthcoming. His regiment had expected to be ordered abroad almost immediately—at least Adison Cheetham had taken pains to secure a commission in one that was likely to be called into immediate action—but some change had been made which detained it indefinitely.

Meantime Pearle Radcliffe, for whom Richard, as a boy, had conceived a great admiration, returned from the fashionable school where she had been sent to "finish off,"

and his boyish admiration assumed tenfold proportions, soon deepening into warmest love, which, being reciprocated by the young lady, an engagement ensued, which was regarded with great satisfaction by the friends of both parties.

Immediately all thought of life in the army became exceedingly distasteful to the young captain, and he forthwith set about trying to dispose of his commission. He succeeded, and believing himself to be the happiest man alive, he gave his whole attention to the preparation of a suitable home for his bride, resolving to lead a very domestic life, and get all the good out of the world that was possible for a country gentleman. He was a large-hearted, pure, and noble-minded man, and all who knew him honored and respected him.

Adison Cheetham, our third prominent character, was some five years older than Richard Byrnholm, and the latter had become acquainted with him, as he told Pearle, while attending the same college. Although so much older, and in the form above Richard, he had seemed to become instantly and strangely attracted to the handsome new scholar. Before this, Cheetham had been one by himself—"glummy," his school-fellows had called him. He was a close student, unexceptionable in his deportment, and a good scholar. But no one liked him, or seemed willing to fraternize with him. He never spoke of himself, his antecedents were unknown, and his history previous to his advent at school a mystery to all save himself. He was supposed to be poor, for although he was dainty about his person and clothing, his apparel was very ordinary, and limited to a few articles, while he never appeared to have any ready money, and never mingled with the students in their games or frolics. But from the mo-

ment of young Byrnholm's appearance, he joined himself to him, won his confidence and esteem, by protecting him from many of those little annoyances which always attend the advent of a new scholar, and constituting himself his champion and protector upon all occasions.

Richard had plenty of money, and spent it freely, and his new friend found himself in "high clover." The lad admired the grave, dignified student. His vanity was touched, to be thus noticed by a scholar in an upper form, and from that time forth he was his model *par excellence*, and there was nothing under the sun too good for him.

Richard was unusually capable for his years, and the ambitious desire seized him to go ahead of his own class, and gain admittance to the form of which his friend was a member.

His natural ability, his untiring application, together with the assistance which he received from Cheetham, won the day, and at the beginning of the second year he was promoted to the upper form.

The praises he received from his father, the approbation expressed by his instructors, fired him anew, and he determined he would stand second to no one. He dared to have a secret from his friend—he dared to contend with one who could bear no such thing as defeat.

The theme was to be written in verse, which came almost as naturally to him as his mother tongue. He kept his own counsel, toiled diligently, and won—won the prize, to the astonishment of the whole school and all the faculty, and to the utter discomfiture of his friend, who had vowed that *nothing* should make him fail of his desired object.

Richard Byrnholm had not once dreamed that Cheetham's heart was so relentlessly set upon winning. He

knew the conflict was open to all who chose to try, and Adison having been very quiet and self-contained about the matter, as he was about all things, he did not realize the bitterness which defeat would bring him. Had he realized this, his regard for his friend would have far outweighed his desire for the prize.

It would be impossible to describe the tumult of feelings which raged in the heart of the conquered hero, or the expression of blank amazement and rage upon his face, when the verdict of the examining committee was rendered.

"Byrnholm won the prize! I didn't even know he was trying for it," he was heard to mutter, as he passed his hand over his perfectly colorless face.

For a moment it seemed as if a very demon of hate and bitterness possessed him. His teeth were locked together like a vise, his hands clenched until the nails were purple, and his eyes perfectly frightful in their expression. Then, unmindful of all rules of order, he arose from his seat, strode from the room, proceeded to his own chamber, where he locked himself in, and neither threats nor entreaties from teacher or pupil availed to make him open the doors to give them admittance.

At the end of twenty-four hours, however, he again made his appearance, with an air of *sang froid* and composure that was considerably re-assuring, although his face was still very pale from the battle which he had evidently been fighting with himself.

Richard Byrnholm went to him instantly, his great, generous heart deeply pained that his vanity should have caused his best friend so much sorrow.

"Old friend," he said, humbly, "I'm no end sorry, and I'd never have tried if I had thought you'd take it so

to heart, though I did want to do something to please the governor."

For one instant Adison Cheetham's eyes blazed fiercest wrath and hatred upon his successful rival; the next, a wan but sinister smile wreathed his pale lips, as, extending his hand with an appearance of frankness and cordiality, he said, with a forced laugh:

"Never mind, Rich, now; *we'll make this thing even some other time!*"

Richard Byrnholm gratefully took the proffered hand, believing the reconciliation complete, and voted his friend the "noblest fellow alive," never dreaming that behind those apparently careless words there lurked a purpose so deadly and vindictive which only the rankest hatred could conceive.

To all appearance, the friendship which this event had threatened to destroy was renewed, and prolonged until the young men finished their course and each had gone their own way. Excepting the time that Adison Cheetham had assisted Richard to procure his commission, they had not met since then until now.

Richard had written his friend concerning his engagement as soon as it occurred—a year previous to the opening of our story—and had received in reply the customary congratulations and good wishes.

A month before his marriage was to occur, he had written him again, claiming a long-promised visit and his presence at his wedding as "best man."

There was to be a musical convention in the county town during the week immediately preceding the wedding, and knowing Adison's love for music, he had deemed that this also would be a rare treat to him.

Adison Cheetham accepted that invitation; he came to

"Linden Grange," Richard's home, with a smile on his lips and a devil in his heart.

He was introduced to the fair bride-elect, and no woman had ever seemed so fair to him before; while Pearle, on the contrary, at once conceived a strong aversion to him, which, notwithstanding her efforts to conceal, he was not slow to perceive.

CHAPTER III.

"I SHALL YET W I N "

Pearle Radcliffe, deeply agitated, fled directly to her own room upon parting from her lover. Once there, she sank upon the floor by a great arm-chair, and burying her face in the cushion, gave way to violent and nervous weeping.

The apartment was a perfect gem of taste and elegance, furnished in pink and pearl-tinted silk, softened with hangings of frost-like lace. Every accessory, both needful and ornamental, that could contribute to either comfort or adornment, had found its way into this attractive room, set apart exclusively for the favorite of the house. Beautiful and costly things lay all about. The tables were strewn with rich and elegant articles belonging to the bridal *trousseau*, for the seamstress had been busy here until a late hour. Two or three lovely dresses, nearly completed, lay upon chairs, waiting one more trial to insure a perfect fit before the final stitches should be set. Upon the marble-topped dressing-case there were packages and jewel-cases

of every description—gifts from the numerous friends of the bride-elect.

But everything was unheeded by the weeping girl. No joyous thoughts, no bright anticipations of her approaching nuptials filled her heart; every thought of happiness seemed to have been crowded out by the misery that had taken possession of her.

What could have moved the fair, proud Margaret thus? It was seldom that she allowed her self-possession to be moved by anything.

Proud she was, and sensitive to a painful degree; but she was possessed of a power of self-control which enabled her to conceal her feelings, and to expose at all times a calm exterior to the world.

She was proud of her noble breeding—proud of her stainless name; of her large inheritance, and her kingly brother, whose equal, saving her lover, she did not believe walked the earth. Pride was Pearle Radcliffe's one weak point—her chief fault and besetting sin; and in after years, as she looked back to this hour, she acknowledged, with an humbleness of which she never would have believed herself capable, that but for the timely discipline which One wiser than she sent upon her, it would have ruined her life.

But this depression of which she had told her noble lover, this nervous foreboding and grief—did it prestige a fall from the high pedestal upon which she had set herself and all that belonged to her, to the exclusion of the proper reverence and duty she owed to the Giver of all her blessings? We shall see.

The devil in Adison Cheetham's heart—it had only been lying in wait during all these years—began to work the moment he set foot over the threshold of Richard Byrn-

holm's home and had been introduced to his beautiful bride-elect.

He had never for one moment forgotten or forgiven that ignominious defeat which, years before, he had suffered at school, and at the hands of a mere lad, a stripling so much younger than himself, and whom he had sought only to make a tool of, to cater with his wealth to his selfish desires, and perhaps become a stepping-stone to something better than his doubtful future had heretofore promised. He was to be Richard's guest for a month. He would doubtless meet fair Margaret Radcliffe every day; he would talk with her, mingle with her in company, be thrown constantly in her society, and—what might he not be able to accomplish in a month?

Every hour in her presence wove the spell of her charms more closely about him. She was the most beautiful woman, in his estimation, that he had ever met. A mad idolatry sprang up in his heart—a passion before which he swore that every obstacle should give way. He had determined to *win Richard Byrnholm's bride away from him*—if not by fair means, then by foul.

"I love her, and she shall learn to love me; I *hate him*, and I will *crush him*. I have been waiting to do it all these years. It will be a terrible revenge, but—a sweet one to me. I will win for myself a fair bride, and, better than all, an independent fortune," he muttered to himself in the silence of his own room at Linden Grange, where he matured his evil plans, and waited to smite the friend who had trusted and loved him.

During the first week of his visit he was all that was gentlemanly and proper. The second, he began to assume a familiarity toward Pearle, which, to her pride, was obnoxious in the extreme.

She had intuitively disliked him from the first, but it would never do to betray it, for was he not the most cherished friend of her lover? For his sake, she must conceal her repugnance and displeasure at his attentions as best she could.

There had been an excursion arranged for the last day of the second week of his stay, and a large party were to visit some noted resort about ten miles from Leicester.

In the morning, quite early, Richard rode over to Ash-ton Manor to tell Pearle that a large invoice of articles for the furnishing of Linden Grange had arrived, and it would be impossible for him to leave; he must remain and attend to their disposition. He had, however, he said, arranged for Adison to act as her escort, and trusted she would enjoy the day, and, if it was possible, he would come to escort her home.

Pearle inwardly rebelled against this arrangement, and would have remained at home also had it been possible; but it was not, on account of her own guests, and shutting her little white teeth fiercely together, she bore her vexation as well as she could.

"I *hate* him," she said, when she was for a moment by herself; "I hate the sound of his name, the sight of his face, and there is a look in his eye that is just as false and cruel as can be."

She accompanied the party, however, and Adison Cheet-ham proved himself a most attentive cavalier.

There were twenty or more in the party, and a merry time they had during the lovely morning ride and the ramble after reaching their destination.

An elegant lunch was served in a beautiful grove at noon, and then everybody lounged about for an hour or

two in the best possible humor with himself and his or her neighbor.

Pearle, missing Richard more than she cared to acknowledge, wandered away by herself to a spot where the shade was more dense, and the air cool and fragrant with the smell of pine and hemlock.

Here she strolled leisurely, picking up the little cones that had fallen among the brown needles at her feet, gathering mosses and lichens, and feeling relieved to be by herself for a little while.

"Ah! I have found you at last, Miss Pearle," exclaimed the voice of Adison Cheetham, as, with a swift, noiseless step, he all at once advanced to where Pearle was standing.

She started. It was the first time that he had ever addressed her by the name which only her most intimate friends were privileged to use.

The color flashed over her pure face in a roseate flush that made her tenfold more lovely in the eyes of the man looking at her, although he well knew that anger at his familiarity had alone caused it.

Curbing her impulse to make some scathing reply, she merely said :

"I regret that you should feel any anxiety on my account; there is no danger in this little grove."

"Perhaps not; but I must not neglect my duty," he replied, with an earnest look into the still flushed face. Then he added, with a smile that she could not at all understand: "I suppose in a couple of weeks you expect to be wandering among orange groves and beneath the fair skies of sunny Italy?"

The flush deepened, and her eyes grew troubled. Something in his tone fretted and annoyed her.

"Yes, I suppose so," she answered, coldly.

"Doubtless you anticipate your contemplated tour with a great deal of pleasure," Adison Cheetham remarked; and, to Pearle's sensitive ears, there was a touch of sarcasm in his flexible tones.

"Most certainly," she briefly answered.

"I—I trust nothing may occur to disappoint you," he proceeded, in a strange voice.

She glanced at him in surprise.

"What is likely to occur?" she asked, with a slight curling of her lips.

"How can *I* tell, dear child?" he returned, assuming a protecting air. "Humanity is subject to strange vicissitudes, and they come when least expected sometimes."

Pearle shuddered.

How she grew to dislike him more and more—this croaker, this cruel-eyed, rightly named "fraud," as she believed him to be; and his "dear child" had grated so on her nerves and pride, that she longed to teach him a lesson of respect by applying a sound box on his ear.

No reply was required, however, to the remark—a circumstance for which she was duly thankful, since she could not bear to talk with him on any subject.

But he almost immediately resumed, in a confidential tone, while he keenly watched her expressive face:

"I feel a deep interest in you, Pearle, as—as—ahem!—the affianced of my friend. I call him friend, and I so regard him. I have *tried* to be a faithful friend to him, but——"

"But what, sir?" Pearle demanded, turning upon him her flashing eyes.

He was implying a doubt of Richard's constancy; he was touching her in a tender point.

"But we are all liable to have our confidence misplaced,

and I have not been exempt—neither have you, I fear," he answered, not at all disturbed by her manner, though his remark was completed by a long-drawn sigh.

"Mr. Cheetham, will you be kind enough to explain yourself, and please remember also to *whom* you are speaking," Miss Radcliffe said, haughtily.

A smile of indulgence wreathed his lips at this that made her almost wild. It was as if he regarded her as a spoiled, petulant child who must be borne with patiently.

"Pardon me," he said, gently. "I have truly forgotten to whom I am speaking, since I have been betrayed into saying what I have. Please forget it if you can. Richard is really a very fine young man. He will, no doubt, make an excellent husband; and if he has in the past been guilty of some indiscretions, why, it is no more than others have done before him, though—I——"

"*Well?*" she demanded, imperatively, her proud head uplifted like a stag at bay, her nostrils dilated with anger, her haughty face one sheet of vivid scarlet.

"Ah!" he said, deprecatingly, and making a gesture of regret; "I am making more and more of a muddle. Pray let us change the subject, before I offend you more deeply."

"No!" Pearle cried, all her indignation concentrated in the one word. "You evidently have had some *motive* in saying this much; you are trying to make me dissatisfied with and suspicious of the man who is almost my husband—you, who pretend to be a noble man's friend."

"Pretend!" Mr. Cheetham repeated, in grieved surprise, and with sorrowfully arching eyebrows.

"Yes, pretend. Had you been true and honorable, you would never have inflicted this sting upon me. You are seeking to undermine my confidence in one of the noblest

men who walks the earth—to poison my mind against him. But you cannot do it, and you are but a pretender to the friendship you claim to have for Richard Byrnholm; for no sincere friend would accept his hospitality and then betray his trust, as you have done to-day."

The scorn and loathing which the fair girl's words and manner betrayed were very hard for Adison Cheetham to bear patiently; but he had not expected that his conquest would be an easy one, and if any amount of forbearance would accomplish the result he desired, he could well afford to exercise it.

"Ah! how exceedingly unfortunate I am! I crave your pardon for the thoughtless words I have spoken. Miss Radcliffe, say that you forgive me," he returned, so respectfully and humbly that for a moment Pearle was disarmed.

She glanced at him uneasily.

Was it possible that Richard had been wild and indiscreet while at school, and had done something which he would be glad to have concealed? Had she been too hasty in her judgment of the man standing apparently so crest-fallen by her side? Was he, after all, a true friend to Richard, but out of a sincere regret for the past and a regard for her, had been betrayed into giving involuntary expression to it?

These questions flashed through her mind all in a moment, and she began to regret her imperious words. Her reason told her that she had been hasty, but in her heart she did not trust him one whit the more.

He saw her face soften into something like penitence; he noticed her indecision and understood her thoughts, and he caught eagerly at these signs.

"Patience," he said to himself; "I shall yet win."

Pearle started to walk on, her brow overcast and troubled,

and he kept by her side, that respectful, humbled look still shadowing his face.

"Have I your forgiveness?" he asked again, in a low, appealing tone, after an awkward silence.

"I have no wish to be unjust to any one," she replied, evasively.

His eyes lighted. The tone was somewhat re-assuring, if the words were not.

"You cannot pardon me; I have incurred your deep displeasure, when I would—Margaret Radcliffe, I would *die* to win your favor!" he cried, his voice actually growing hoarse with the intensity of the passion that suddenly mastered him.

She stopped still in the path where they were walking and looked at him for a moment, speechless with astonishment.

That one look was sufficient to make her comprehend his meaning. He had dared to love her! That was why he had been trying to weaken her confidence in the man she loved.

An angry flush again mounted to her brow, and then faded out into a deathly pallor. Her little hands opened and closed almost spasmodically, while her breath became labored and heavy.

"*You* call yourself Richard Byrnholm's *friend*, and dare to utter such words to *me*! I refuse to listen to you further, Mr. Cheet-em."

She could not help it—the name would come out with just that inflection. He was a fraud, and she had instinctively known it from the very first moment of her acquaintance with him.

As she spoke, she had turned abruptly from him and began to walk on again.

For a moment he stood looking after her, a lurid, dangerous light in his reddish-brown eyes. His name had always been a source of mortification to him. Time and again he had tried to institute a change, calling it Cheetham; but some way it would never stay changed, and gradually degenerated into the old obnoxious pronunciation, very much as Pearle had uttered it, although not quite so marked in accent.

He sprang after the indignant girl as soon as he could control himself, and laying his hand upon her arm, said, almost fiercely :

"You do not know what you are doing when you try me like that. Be warned in time—I would save you if I could."

"Save me from what? I think I should pray to be saved from *you*!" she cried, with bitter scorn.

He ground his teeth, but otherwise paid no heed to the taunt.

"I would save you from a wretched future. These are no idle words I speak; pause before it is too late! I *love* you—I would save you—and, for your sake, *him* also. Pearle," he continued, bending so near her that his hot breath smote her cheek, "can you not understand it—can you not see that in these two weeks I have learned to love you, as a man loves but once in a life-time? You are my ideal of a pure and perfect woman. Come into my heart, and let me make you my queen there—you *are* that even now, whether you will or not. If you marry Richard Byrnholm, you will be wretched—your life wrecked; for you will seal not only your own doom, but his also——"

"Stop!" Margaret Radcliffe cried, in a voice as clear and penetrating as a bell, her face like snow, her form towering proudly to its fullest height, one delicate hand

raised as if to enforce her command, while her gray eyes seemed to emit sparks of fire at the presuming man before her.

"Take your hand from my arm," she again commanded, in low, steady tones.

He dared not disobey, and his hand fell heavily at his side.

"Now," she added, in the same tone, "one word of advice—take heed to your false lips in the future."

A moment of silence ensued after these words.

Adison Cheetham's fiery glance wavered and gradually fell before the pure, but keen and unflinching look of the indignant maiden, until they rested guiltily upon the ground.

An expression of contempt flashed over Miss Radcliffe's expressive face as she noted it; then turning, she walked, without even a backward glance, toward the party she had left at the entrance to the grove, while her vanquished foe stood as if rooted to the spot where she had left him.

CHAPTER IV.

COWARDLY REVENGE.

"I have inserted the wedge, now I can bide awhile," Adison Cheetham muttered.

As the spell of Pearle's pure but outraged look removed, his eyes followed the graceful figure which he dare not overtake.

"She will not rest content until she has fathomed the

meaning of my words," he continued. "Only let me be patient; she will yet seek me to know what I meant. I shall accomplish my double object—revenge myself, and secure a rich and beautiful wife."

He started as he uttered the last words, a cloud of doubt and distrust sweeping over his face.

He took a wallet from the breast of his coat, and opening it, drew forth a slip of printed paper—something that had evidently been clipped from a newspaper—and read it.

"That is all right," he muttered, gloomily, "though why I seem possessed to keep it is more than I can understand, as is also this feeling of nervousness which sometimes steals over me. What a glorious creature that girl is!" he went on, a greedy light in his eyes; "and her fortune!—ah! *what* a comfort it would be to have the fingering of it! I'd make the old place shine, although I am not ashamed of what I have accomplished there already. Richard little dreams of the trap I am setting for him. It's a bold venture; but, if I win, what care I for the risk I run. If she should tell him what has occurred to-day!" he began again, after a moment's silence, and with an uneasy look. "But she will not—she is as proud as Lucifer, and would no more breathe a word of suspicion to him until she knew the truth of it, than she would cut her right hand off. I will give her the *proofs*, however, within a few days, and then we will see."

He put that little slip of paper back carefully into his wallet, and returning that to his pocket, he retraced his own steps and rejoined the company, who were discussing the propriety of returning home.

His brow grew dark as he saw that Richard Byrnholm had arrived, and that Pearle was standing by his side, with all the confidence in the world, while her face beamed with

the glad welcome which she would not allow her lips to utter in the presence of others.

Not a trace of the deep emotion which had so lately moved her was visible in her countenance. She was as self-possessed and apparently as care-free as she had ever been in the world. She did not even betray any recollection or displeasure when Adison Cheetham made his appearance. She concealed her aversion for him, and stood quietly and coolly by while he approached, with his hypocritical smile, and greeted her lover. But in her heart she would have been glad to smite him to the earth where he stood, and proclaim him the arch traitor that she felt him to be.

Yet the keen edge of suspicion had entered her heart, as he had said, and fight against it as she would, yet she was tortured with nervous fears and dire forebodings, and for days she could think of nothing else.

When Richard was by her side, and she could look into his clear, truthful eyes, hear his frank, hearty tones, and feel the protection of his love, all her confidence returned, and she would upbraid herself severely for her distrust.

But when alone in the solitude of her own room, those ominous words of Adison Cheetham's haunted her continually. This vague, intangible something at which he had hinted—this suspicion of evil and dishonor, assumed such monster proportions that she trembled with fear, notwithstanding her repeated resolves to think no more of the matter.

But she could not help thinking of it. She grew irritable and nervous; every sound startled her, every word annoyed her. Her indignation against the author of all this misery grew stronger and stronger. She almost hated herself be-

cause he had dared to address her in that familiar and odious manner. She felt degraded, dishonored that she had been obliged to stand and listen to the wild and passionate words which he had poured, like melted lava, into her ears.

For several days she avoided him; she did not once address him, except as she was obliged to do in common courtesy when in the presence of her lover. But his manner toward her was unchanged; he observed the same outward decorum, the same admiring deference and respect which he had **always** accorded her, and no one would have dreamed of the wild passion which was consuming his very vitals, as he thus schooled himself to await patiently the advances which, sooner or later, he knew she must make.

Only in one way did he give any sign that he remembered their stormy interview. There was in his eyes, whenever they encountered hers, a sort of intense look, a transfixing power, that pierced her like an arrow, and told her that he had not yet done with her.

Many a time Pearle longed to throw herself on her lover's breast and pour out her consuming fears to him—tell him of the insult that had been offered her, and claim his authority to send their treacherous visitor away. But something always held her back, sealing her lips and making her ashamed to give utterance to her trouble.

She knew that Richard had unlimited confidence in his friend—he believed him to be all, and more, than he professed; and if she should denounce him now, she would bring great unhappiness upon him who was as dear as her own life to her, besides causing perhaps a great deal of excitement and **comment** among their numerous guests, and it was so **near the time** for the wedding that she could

not bear the thought of creating any unnecessary disturbance.

On the day following the interview already described between the lovers, all this tumult and secret fear on the part of Pearle was brought to a crisis.

Richard was obliged to make a trip to London upon important business, and would not return until some time in the afternoon. Her brother and his wife and guests were all to spend the day with Lord and Lady Cumbermede at an archery party, while she was obliged to remain at home to give directions to a London milliner who had been engaged to drape the wedding dress and veil, and arrange a few other things which only her tasteful fingers were deemed capable of doing.

She wandered from room to room, feeling sad, lonely, and miserable. Again and again she reviewed in her mind the interview she had had with Adison Cheetham in the grove, dwelling upon his ominous words, and magnifying them until it seemed as if some terrible specter of the past was about to rise up and destroy both herself and Richard.

"I shall go wild if I endure this suspense longer; it is better to face the worst than to bear this uncertainty," she said, before the day was half spent. "If he really imagines that he has discovered something against Richard, it may be some mistake which I can set right. Why did not I think of this before? The idea that my true and noble lover can have done anything from the consequences of which I should need to be saved, is simply preposterous. I will see him, have the matter all explained, and then I shall have some peace again," she argued, with feverish cheeks, as she sat down to her writing-desk, and, with nervous and trembling fingers, dashed off a few words

requiring Adison Cheetham's immediate presence, which she at once dispatched to him by a trusty servant.

Not a doubt of Richard's truth and rectitude had disturbed her trust in him; not a suspicion of any wrong that could in any way affect her troubled her heart. There might have been, she thought, some boyish freak while at school which Adison Cheetham had imagined worse than it really was, and had, out of jealousy and a malignant desire to injure him, tried to make her believe that he had been guilty of some enormity.

This was what she had thought at first; then, as she marked the man's respect and courtesy during her continued avoidance of him, she began to feel that she had wronged him, although she could not forgive him for speaking those impulsive words of love to her—he had no right to utter those under any circumstances. But perhaps he did really believe there was something wrong, which would make her miserable if she should discover it after her marriage, and desired to warn her in season. But of course it was all a mistake, whatever it was; she would talk it over quietly with him, and she felt, or tried to feel, sure that it would prove so.

A sinister, triumphant smile curled Adison Cheetham's lips when he received Pearle's message. He had begun to fear that her indomitable pride would be too much for him, and that he should have to begin the battle again himself; for he had not for a moment relinquished his evil purpose. But now there was no need; he had everything arranged, and considered the game in his own hands.

"The victory is mine," he muttered, exultantly, as he prepared to obey her summons.

Pearle received him in the library, and her manner, although courteous, was somewhat cold and distant.

"What can I do for you, Miss Pearle?" Adison asked, as he greeted her with rather more assurance than was necessary under the circumstances.

Both his words and manner angered her at once.

"For one thing, you can, if you please, address me by my proper name," she returned, all her distrust of him returning immediately.

"You are called Pearle, I believe——" he began.

"By my *friends*," she interrupted.

"And am I not to be classed among those, my fair Pearle—my rare Pearle?" he asked, softly, and with a gloating look in his eye that betrayed how sure he was of accomplishing his purpose.

She lifted her head—that small, proud head—with a gesture that he loved to see, she looked so like a queen. But he could not meet unmoved the flash of her glorious eyes, and his own, as once before, drooped guiltily beneath their fire.

"I am Miss Radcliffe, sir—at least, for the present," she added, significantly. "Do not forget it again, if you please."

It is impossible to describe the icy hauteur with which this was said.

Mr. Cheetham bowed with mock humility, but the look on his face made the fair girl shiver with dread.

"I requested this interview," she resumed, after a moment, but feeling that she would give worlds if she never had requested it, "in order to end the suspense which your insinuations regarding Captain Byrnholm have occasioned me. Will you explain to what you referred—that is, if you can?"

"I am prepared to do so, Miss Radcliffe—I came pre-

pared to do so, as I supposed that was what you wanted of me," he quietly replied.

She grew pale at his assured tone.

"You said that if I married Richard Byrnholm, my doom and his would be sealed," she said.

"And so it will. The day that you marry him, he will be arrested for—*bigamy* and *forgery*!"

"*Sir!*"

She turned upon him like a hunted animal driven to bay.

"Well?" he questioned, composedly.

"Do you dare use such language to *me*, and in connection with *him*?" she whispered, in strained tones.

"I not only dare, but I can prove what I assert, here and now," he said, with slow and dreadful emphasis.

"I do not believe it."

Her white lips framed the loyal words, but no sound issued from them.

He merely bowed.

His cool assurance drove her nearly frantic.

"It is false!" she cried. "Such crimes are as foreign to his high and noble nature as cold is to heat, darkness to daylight."

"You have been grossly deceived," he returned, in cold, hard tones; "you have been led to think that you were going to marry a *knight* after your own heart, a *gentleman* of high degree and lofty principle. You have idealized Richard Byrnholm, and imagined that the earth held no other being so pure and noble; but beneath his bland and genial exterior, his assumption of truth, honor, and nobility, there lies hidden a duplicity only equaled by his excessive cunning."

"And *you*, his *friend*, are the first to discover and tell

me of this!" Margaret Radcliffe cried, with indignant scorn.

A peculiar smile flitted across the lips of her companion.

"If hiding his wickedness would save *you*——" he began.

"Enough!" she interrupted. "I can read *your* character like an open book. You are not his friend—you are his secret enemy. At some time in the past he has, perhaps, unintentionally offended you; you cannot forgive the offense, and now, under the guise of friendship, you are seeking his ruin. I know not what your vile plot may be. You are a hypocrite, but I pray you do not assume the character longer in my presence. Come to the point, and let me know the worst at once."

Adison Cheetham was not often taken by surprise nor thrown off his guard, but this keen, proud-spirited girl had indeed read his character like an open book. A feeling of shame for the moment cowed him; a sudden pallor swept over his cruel face, and his guilty eyes dropped to the floor again.

But it was only for an instant; he had come there to conquer instead of being conquered.

With an effort, he met her scornful look with one of smiling defiance.

"You are possessed of more penetration, Miss Radcliffe, than I gave you credit for," he said, mockingly.

"You own the imputation, then. Thank you for being honest for once," retorted Pearle, sarcastically, before he could go on.

He flushed angrily.

"I *will* come to the point at once," he said, showing his teeth savagely, like an angry dog. "I *am* the secret enemy of Richard Byrnholm, and have been for years.

He did me a wrong once that I vowed I would never forgive, and I swore then that some day I would be even with him——”

“You doubtless refer to the prize which he won from you when you were at school together,” Pearle again interrupted, instantly remembering what Richard had told her regarding it.

“And did he presume to boast of his success to you?” he demanded, an angry flush suffusing his whole face.

“No, he did not boast of it to me; he was extolling your virtues, and related the circumstance to prove how nobly you had conquered your disappointment and vexation, and still generously accorded him your friendship.”

“Ha! ha!” It was a bitter, mocking laugh.

“Where is your manhood—where your sense of honor?” Pearle cried, her beautiful face all aglow with indignation and disdain. “How little and mean the nature that could cherish such a petty spite toward one who has ever been so generous and true! It was a lawful race that you both ran. If his powers were superior to yours and he won the prize, why should you desire revenge?”

“But he cheated me—he kept the secret from me. I did not once think, with so much hard work as he would have to do to keep up with the class, that he would try. I will not spare him for it,” he concluded, with malice gleaming from every feature.

“I do not believe you can injure him—I do not believe you can mar his character in a single point,” Pearle replied, bravely; yet her eyes searched his face eagerly, as if she was not quite so confident as she expressed herself.

For reply, he drew from his inner breast-pocket a package tied with scarlet tape. With tantalizing deliberation

he carefully picked the hard knot apart, a cruel smile curling his lips the while.

At last he handed Pearle a little book with a morocco cover.

"Please to glance over the items written in this book," he said, quietly.

With fingers that trembled visibly, and her heart sinking like a dead weight in her bosom, she took it from him and began to turn the leaves.

The words "private expenses" upon the first page, and written in the hand she knew so well, riveted her attention.

"How came you by this? What right have you to bring it to me?" she demanded, indignantly.

"It is no matter *how* I came by it, and I have a right to—save *you* if I can," he returned, passionately.

She turned from him impatiently, and her eye fell upon the words, "Family expenses at the Dove-cote for the quarter ending June 31st, fifty pounds."

A mist for a minute blurred her sight, and she caught her breath as if with a sudden pain.

Family expenses at the Dove-cote! Where was the Dove-cote, and what family was residing there whose expenses Richard Byrnholm was defraying?

Brushing the mist from her eyes, and trying to steady her quivering nerves, she looked further down the page.

"Dress for Ariel, £10; playthings for Richie, £1; debts of honor, £50; machine for Ariel, £15 10s.," etc.

With a face like chalk, and a heart from which every bright hope seemed slipping away, Pearle continued to turn the leaves almost mechanically, reading similar items all the way along.

"Ariel! Who is Ariel—who is Richie?" her white lips murmured, a hunted look creeping into her large eyes.

"Ariel *Byrnholm* is a young and beautiful woman, almost as fair as Margaret Radcliffe. Richie is a little cherub, with rosy cheeks, curling black hair, and eyes of the same hue," Addison Cheetham answered, significantly.

"What do you mean?" she almost shrieked.

"I mean that Richard Byrnholm is already a married man—or, if not, he *ought* to be; and *Richie*, *Ariel's* child, is his son!"

There was no pity, no relenting in that cruel man's heart, as he looked into Pearle Radcliffe's death-like face and told her this dreadful thing.

If she had died on the spot he would not have cared, so that he could make Richard Byrnholm suffer and gain his revenge. But he knew she would not die—she was made of sterner stuff than that; she would live, and he would bear away before the eyes of his enemy the bride that was dearer than his own life to him.

CHAPTER V.

"I CANNOT BELIEVE YOU."

"It is false! as false as your own heart and the lips that dared to utter so vile a charge!" Pearle Radcliffe retorted, passionately, but with a stony look in her lovely eyes.

Addison Cheetham preserved an ominous silence, as if that point was not worth arguing. This very circumstance increased her fear.

"What possible proof can you have of what you assert?" she questioned, at length.

"I have been to the Dove-cote," he answered, briefly.

"You! Where is it?"

"About ten miles from here, in a little lane that leads to the right from the Uppingham road; and, Miss Radcliffe, let me assure you it is a dainty little nest for the blue-eyed dove who inhabits it."

It seemed to Pearle as if the sun was being suddenly put out, and she was groping in darkness from which she would never emerge.

He had been so precise in describing the location of the Dove-cote. She knew there was a lane leading from the Uppingham road about ten miles distant; she knew, too, that there was a tiny cottage there, nestling among the trees; she had passed by it more than once; she had seen it, and wondered whose home was in that cozy nest. Now she had learned, but could she credit the dreadful intelligence? Ariel—that was what he had called her—had blue eyes; she was a blonde, then. Richie—who was he named for—had black eyes and black, curling hair; so too had Richard Byrnholm. Heavens! was she going mad, or only dreaming?

"How do you know that—that—*they* live there?" she whispered.

"Ariel and Richie? Oh, I have *seen* them."

Pearle caught her breath with a gasp.

"Well, that may be; but what right have you to say that they are anything to—to *him*?" she asked, with a shudder.

"Does not what you hold in your hand prove it?" he asked, pointing to the little book which lay in her nervous fingers. "It ought; but, fortunately, I can give you still stronger proof. First, I will tell you how I happened to have that little memorandum of expenses. I chanced to

enter the library at Linden Grange one day just after Richard had been summoned to give directions to some workmen. This book was lying open on the table, and I read what you have just now read. I naturally began to wonder what family resided at the Dove-cote, and why Richard should be burdened with the expense of it. Yesterday it lay again upon his table, and I took possession of it to show to you. I began to think that there must be some mystery connected with his life, and I set myself to work to ferret it out. I began by watching him, and he has made no less than four journeys to the Dove-cote during my stay here, and always late at night, and I have followed him each time. Once during the day, of late, I rode thither, and found a charming little black-eyed boy playing by himself beneath an arbor formed by a honeysuckle vine. No one else appeared to be about, and I made friends with him. I got him to lisp his name—'Richie Byrnholm' he said it was—and just then a beautiful, golden-haired woman came to the porch of the cottage and called, in flute-like tones, 'Richie, Richie, come in to mamma now.' This I knew must be Ariel. I was satisfied; the mystery was solved."

"It must be some other Mrs. Byrnholm and her child—some relative; he could *never* be guilty of such a crime," Pearle moaned, in a voice of horror.

"Then what need of his secret visits to the place?—what of his love for his little namesake? For I have seen him gather that child in his arms, murmuring fond words over him, and caressing him with tenderest affection."

Pearle reeled in her chair, and clutched at the table for support. She was suffering the torture of the rack.

"It must be some relative," she murmured, brokenly, again.

"Then why does he hide her in that remote place?" pursued her tormentor. "Why not acknowledge her as a relative, and go boldly in the day-time to visit her as such? No; your immaculate lover is a gambler, a *roue*, and a forger also, as I shall soon prove to you."

"Hush!" she whispered, beseechingly, and glancing fearfully around; while he smiled to see by the look on her white face how thoroughly she believed his tale.

"I call him a gambler," he continued, pitilessly, "and so he is; for you have seen recorded in his own handwriting the amount paid to liquidate *debts of honor*, and we all know what those are; and, Miss Pearle, I do not need to ask you if you know what a forger is, nor what the penalty is for that crime."

She lifted her eyes in a helpless way to him, as if she had no power to break the net he was weaving around her.

"I cannot believe you; you are telling me cunningly-devised fables," she murmured.

He handed her two folded papers.

"Examine those," he said.

As if she had no power to resist him, she unfolded them and looked.

They were checks on the county bank, and made out to Richard Byrnholm. One represented eighty pounds, the other two hundred.

Pearle turned them over, and saw Richard's name, in his own bold hand, written on the back.

"Where did you get these?" she asked.

"Do you perceive anything wrong about those checks?" Adison Cheetham asked, unheeding her question.

"No."

"Do you not notice that on the check representing two hundred pounds, the two ciphers are a trifle crowded, while

the word 'two' in the writing is not just as perfect as it should be?"

"Yes, I notice that the ciphers are a little close; but that proves nothing."

"Look again at the figure 2; it is very cleverly done, but the *curves* have been added to it. The check originally represented £10. The figure 1 has been changed to represent 2, and a cipher added to make the whole 200. Look at the one for £80; that was originally for only one-tenth as much; a cipher has been added there also. These changes can scarcely be detected, but an expert would grasp the fact at once," explained the cunning plotter.

"Are *you* an 'expert,' that you have been so clever?" Pearle demanded, scornfully.

"No; but I am aware that these checks have been tampered with, nevertheless," he answered, flushing at her tone.

"Please explain how you learned so much?"

"Certainly. I was present when both these checks were made out to Richard—you perceive they are both of the same date. I knew their amount, and so, of course, when I next saw them I was convinced they had been tampered with."

"I think you must have taken considerable trouble to discover so much. Perhaps you may even have had a hand in this matter yourself; I should not be at all surprised, if you could pilfer from his private desk or safe to get possession of these things, as you must have done, in order to bring them to me."

Pearle's tones were very quiet, but intensely sarcastic. She was making a brave fight for her lover, but in her heart a terrible fear was nearly driving her frantic.

Again Adison Cheetham flushed hotly, and bit his lips till the blood flowed.

"I swear to you——" he began.

"You need not swear to me at all," she interrupted. "I am not so foolish as to think that people are careless enough to leave indorsed checks lying loosely about. I know you must have been prying into Richard Byrnholm's secret affairs, in order to have become possessed of these things that you have brought me to-day. But I am not to be deceived by you. What could any one wish to tamper with two such comparatively small amounts for, when they possessed as abundant means as he does? It is simply absurd."

"Not so absurd as you may suppose. I happen to know that Richard has been spending a great deal of money lately. Think of the expense he has been putting into the Grange for *you*; count those debts of honor in that little book, and see what *they* amount to. He has gone beyond his income; he is pressed for money, and, with this *other family* on his hands, it is not to be wondered at that he should wish for more. I suppose you recognize his writing on the back?" Adison Cheetham concluded, with some eagerness.

Pearle examined it again carefully.

"Yes; that was without doubt written by himself," she said.

"You identify it, then—you have no doubt of it?"

"No; it is identical with that in the memorandum book," she answered, comparing the two.

"Good! I swear to you those checks have been tampered with. Now are you convinced—now will you believe that I wish to save you from a cheat and a villain?" he asked, an almost fiendish glitter in his eyes.

"No!" Pearle Radcliffe cried, her voice ringing out clear and full once more, and lifting her small head with the air of a queen. "Instead, I believe that at heart *you* are a cowardly knave. You have been nursing a mean spirit of revenge for years, and are bound to ruin Richard Byrnholm if you can. And as for your plea—that you desire to save *me*—I have no faith in it. Furthermore, I fancy I am entirely capable of looking out for myself."

"And you will not believe me—you will not believe that the man whom you promised to marry is a villain and a forger?" he demanded, his face growing dark and almost terrible in his wrath that he could not shake her faith.

"I will not," she answered, resolutely.

"How can you doubt it, with those proofs in your hands?"

She looked at the checks again, with a smile on her lips, which, nevertheless, trembled somewhat. She really feared much more than she would avow to him. If Richard had not done this thing himself, the deed had nevertheless been done, and no matter who the guilty one was, he might be obliged to suffer for it. But she was determined to brave out this interview, and then, just as soon as Richard returned, she would tell him all about it, and let him explain it to her.

"Shall I tell you *just* what I think about these?" she asked, flashing her glorious eyes upon him scornfully, and rattling the checks with a little impatient movement. "I think," she went on, "that these checks were made out to Richard Byrnholm for the amounts which you stated—eight and ten pounds respectively. I think that he indorsed them, intending to get them cashed, and *you*, knowing the fact, *stole* them and tampered with the figures,

making the changes which you claim have been made, simply to get him into trouble and disgrace him. There! now you know my opinion of this matter," she concluded, defiantly.

Adison Cheetham's face grew as white as her own as he listened to these stinging words, and he had a savage fight within himself for a moment to keep back the oaths which leaped to his tongue for utterance. But he did control himself, and finally threw back his head, laughing a light, mocking laugh.

"That was very cleverly reasoned for a woman," he said; "but I fear if those papers were given to a judge and jury, a very different verdict would be rendered. However, leaving those out of the case entirely, what have you to say regarding the contents of that little book? You surely cannot accuse me of having tampered with that, since the dates begin a year or two back;" and he pointed to the little memorandum book that she had laid upon the table by her side.

Instantly the checks dropped from her fingers, and she seized it again, turning its pages and eagerly scanning their contents, her face as hueless as snow, a terrible pain in her heart.

With a sly, cat-like movement, Adison Cheetham reached over and secured the checks she had just dropped, and, folding them, transferred them carefully to his pocket.

That single act did more toward convincing Pearle of the truth of his words, and that a forgery had really been committed, than anything else. It was as if he was sure of his position, and meant to keep them to carry out some deadly purpose.

All too late she saw that she had made a sad mistake. She should have retained them in her possession until she

could see Richard, show them to him, and demand an explanation.

She felt as if she should die, sitting there before that plotting, gloating man, with all this avalanche of trouble and danger pouring down upon her.

What must she believe as she read those items, penned by Richard's own hand—those items of expenses for Ariel and her child—those debts of honor?

There seemed to be but one explanation of it all. Ariel, she knew, could not be his legal wife, else he would never dare wed her while she was living, and so near. No; *if* she was *anything* to Richard Byrnholm, she must be some wronged, betrayed, though trusting woman. The thought was like a dagger to her.

Could Richard Byrnholm, whom she had hitherto believed to be the soul of honor, be such a villain, and so devoid of every principle of rectitude and honor? Could it be possible that he was indeed a gambler and a forger? Had she been thus shamelessly deceived, and was the future, which had hitherto looked so bright to her, about to become a blank?

Oh! if she could but have gone away somewhere and moaned out her misery by herself. It was dreadful to sit there and have that wretch watching every change in her countenance, and gloating over the wreck he was making of all her fond hopes.

"What do you think of them, I say?" he repeated, impatiently. "Do they not go to prove that the drain upon Captain Byrnholm's purse has been very heavy? Debts of honor, a beautiful woman and her child to support, not to mention the extravagances he has been guilty of in fitting up that small palace over yonder for your reception—does it not look, I ask you, as if there was some need to change

those figures upon those checks to a larger denomination? Would not a judge and jury argue that way, think you, if the matter was laid before them? And, Miss Radcliffe, do you know the doom of a forger?"

Had Pearle been in the presence of any other person, she would have shrieked aloud for mercy at these dreadful words. She grew blind and dizzy, almost paralyzed with fear; for she read in that relentless, evil face before her a determination to ruin her lover at any cost. But in her invincible pride she resolved that he should not triumph in her sufferings—he should not suspect how much she believed; and, with a mighty effort, she rallied her dizzy senses.

"I think," she said, speaking in a hard, pitiless tone, "that *you* are a scheming, vindictive brute, bent on the ruin of a noble, large-hearted man! I believe that Captain Byrnholm could explain all this complication of evidence satisfactorily if he were here and it was submitted to him—a thing which I am determined to have him do before I pass judgment upon him;" and she arose, moved across the room, and laid her hand upon the bell-rope.

"Stop! What are you going to do?" cried the startled villain, springing toward her.

His peremptory tone, and something in his face, arrested her hand before she could ring.

"I am going to dispatch a messenger to summon Captain Byrnholm—the afternoon train, I think, has come in—and demand an explanation in your presence of all with which you have charged him," she said, with a resolute air.

The man looked baffled for an instant. Evidently he had not anticipated any such straightforward proceeding as this on her part, and was not prepared for it. Then, with

a look and vehemence of manner that startled Pearle almost entirely out of her forced composure, he laid his hand heavily upon hers as it rested upon the bell-rope, and said, fiercely :

"The messenger that goes to summon Captain Byrnholm will be followed by one to bring an officer to arrest him on the spot."

Pearle reeled, and leaned weakly against the wall for support, at these threatening words, and her white face grew agonized. Clearly this wretch intended to show no mercy. He had laid his own plans, and meant to carry them out to the letter.

"Why did you come to me with these facts? What is your motive for laying all this black catalogue of crime before me?" she cried wildly, as she sank helplessly into a chair, and threw off his hand as if it had been a viper.

"You sent for me, did you not?" he asked, with a malicious grin.

She stamped her foot angrily; he goaded her to desperation.

"Yes, I sent for you, because your vile hints and insinuations haunted me continually, giving me no peace, and driving me wild with suspense. What are your wishes, intentions, and motives in all this?" she demanded.

"Well, I have wishes, I have *intentions*, and I have *motives*," he began, slowly, while the look softened in his eyes, and a longing expression quivered over his face, as he gazed on her who, despite her pallor and anguish, was surpassingly lovely.

She made an impatient movement for him to go on.

"You have said truly," he continued; "I have been Richard Byrnholm's sworn enemy for years; I have vowed that he should one day dearly repent having thwarted me

in a cherished purpose. Had he been poorer than I, I would have drawn him so deeply into pecuniary troubles that he would never have been able to extricate himself; but he was rich and I was poor. I have laid numberless plans to be even with him, but none seemed feasible, and so I was obliged to drop them. When he wanted a commission, I thought my time had come. I told him I could procure him one through the influence of a friend; I did, and in a regiment which was destined to go into immediate action, where I hoped he would be killed, and I should never meet him again. But some change was made, and I was thwarted in that. I was glad of this afterward, for I thought I should be better avenged to have him suffer some living torture."

"What a wretch!—to plan all this simply because he won a paltry prize from you at school; somebody must win," Pearle cried, amazed to see how much he made out of so little.

"It was not a paltry prize to me; it meant a great deal," he answered, hotly; "I was a poor boy. I belonged to a good family, but we were crushed with poverty, and I have had to work my way in the world. I have been trampled upon on account of it, jeered at, and twitted of it; and I have sworn that I will yet rise to the level of those who have sneered at me. The prize was to be a set of very valuable works, or their value—thirty guineas in gold. I wanted the gold; I *needed* it. It would have kept me a whole year at school; but I lost it, and had to go out and earn it before I could finish my course, and I lost a year by that means. Think you that was a small loss—a whole year of one's life? If he had not treacherously kept his purpose a secret, I might have won even then—I *would* have won; I would have strained every nerve. He was

the only one I had to fear, and I might have outstripped even him."

"But Richard would gladly have helped you to defray the expense of that year. I know he would have been eager to make it up to you, if it was simply money that you wanted," Pearle said, as he paused for breath.

"Simply money!" he repeated, wrathfully. "I lost my degree also—I lost my self-respect, for I believed there were none to go ahead of me; and to be left behind by a mere lad, years younger than myself—I could not brook the mortification and disappointment of such a defeat. I vowed I never would forgive it. I never have; I never will," he concluded, gloomily.

CHAPTER VI.

"HOW CAN I SAVE HIM?"

"But we are wandering from the point under discussion," Adison Cheetham continued, after a moment's pause. "My motive in making you the medium of my revenge was——"

"*You make me* the medium of your revenge! Never!" cried the astonished girl, starting to her feet again, and confronting him in a blaze of indignation.

She had never looked so lovely to him as at that moment, and his whole face softened into wonderful tenderness, while a yearning, wistful look came into his eyes.

She was indeed strikingly beautiful as she stood there,

like some haughty princess, her slender form drawn erect, and quivering with resentment and disdain.

Her face was as pure as the jewel whose name she bore; her massive hair, falling loosely away from her brow in rich, glossy waves, was simply coiled at the back of her small head, revealing its symmetrical proportions to the best advantage. Her large gray eyes glowed and scintillated with angry fire, and seemed to deepen to almost a purplish tint; her nostrils dilated, her lips quivered. Her long trailing dress, of some dark, rich material, fell in soft folds around her, making her seem taller than she really was. One white hand was half raised to enforce her indignant protest, and her position was one of inimitable grace.

Adison Cheetham thought that the eye of man had never been permitted to rest upon a fairer vision since the day when Adam first beheld lovely Eve in her maiden bower in Paradise, although it was an angry beauty that glowed and sparkled before him, fascinating him with her charms, and weaving her magic spell more closely around him. He liked her spirit—she was glorious in his sight. But he began to realize that he was pursuing a course dangerous to his own cause, in allowing her to read quite so much of the evil in his heart; he must not make her hate him.

"Pardon me, I should not have said that—I did not really mean that, but you drove me to it," he began, humbly. "I would win your love, my pure, beautiful Pearle; I would woo you, and charm you, and I am only driving you away from me. I have loved you madly since the hour Richard Byrnholm first introduced you to me, and a wild desire then took possession of me to win you for my wife. Pearle, my darling, my lily queen, my fair,

pale princess, give me your love in return—promise to become *my* bride on Thursday morning instead of *his*, and I will become your humble slave; no man has ever yielded richer homage to woman than I will give to you, my matchless Pearle. I will bow to your wishes; my every thought and purpose in life shall be for you; you shall make of me what you will. I am a bad man at heart—I confess it, I deplore it; but, for your sake, I could conquer the maddest passion that ever ran riot in a human soul. Pearle, you can save me from evil, and—from myself. My love, my love!—ah! *teach* me how to win you."

He stopped, exhausted by the vehemence of his passion, and the change in his face was wonderful. Every evil look and expression had faded from it, as he poured forth this wild plea for her love. He became softened, tender, attractive, almost fascinating, by the power and might of the great love that had taken possession of him. There was a magnetic power of attraction about him that riveted the attention and held spell-bound for the moment the fair girl before him.

He had told her before that he loved her, but she never had imagined anything like this. Its depth, its strength, its almost consuming force, were beyond her comprehension; and, for a moment, she lost all thought of self, all sense of the insult offered to her, in wonder at the strange being who yielded her such abject homage.

"Pearle, beloved, give me but a crumb of love. I will feed upon it and be satisfied," he pleaded, reaching out his arms as if to infold her.

The act recalled her to herself, and all her outraged maidenly dignity asserted itself. She recoiled from him as she would have done from the fatal embrace of some deadly reptile.

"If I were a *man*," she said, in low, intense tones, "I would send you from this room with the mark of the lash upon you, to brand you as the traitor and knave that you are, for having dared to utter such words to me! Since I am but a weak woman, I must content myself with simply despising you, and telling you to begone!" and she pointed authoritatively to the door.

Adison Cheetham shivered as these blighting words fell upon his ears; then a wave of deepest crimson dye shone over his face, and the great veins stood out in ridges upon his forehead.

"A love like *mine* is not a thing to be despised," he said, through tightly shut teeth.

But Pearle Radcliffe did not deem his words even worthy of a reply. She stood in the same attitude, her delicate hand still pointing toward the door, her eyes fixed in a cold, contemptuous stare upon his.

Her silence was more suggestive than the bitterest invectives would have been, and the painful flush deepened on his face. In all his life he had never suffered so keenly as he did at this moment, when he was thus made to feel his own littleness of soul, his inferiority and depravity, as he had never done before. He was, as it were, like "Satan," when

"He first knew pain,
And writhed him to and fro convolved; so sore
The grinding sword with discontinuous wound
Passed him through:
Gnashing for anguish, and despite, and shame,
To find himself not matchless, and his pride
Humbled by such rebuke."—MILTON.

The color receded after a moment, leaving his face pale and drawn, an almost diabolical resoluteness succeeding the tenderness.

"Margaret Radcliffe," he said, slowly, and with terrible emphasis, "you may scorn the truest love that was ever offered woman—you may curl those sweet, red lips, heaping scathing words upon me—you may flash your glorious eyes with angry disdain, but you cannot move me from my purpose."

Without a word, she turned and again laid her hand upon the bell-rope. She was resolved that he should not longer stand there and insult her. She would summon a servant to show him out, and command that he never be admitted again.

But again he was too quick for her. He put out his own strong hand and grasped hers before she could pull the cord.

"I am not quite ready to end this interview," he said, quickly. "Evidently you consider what I have told you as of no consequence, or too wild and monstrous to be credited even for a moment; but I swear to you that these documents which I hold in my possession will doom Richard Byrnholm to a felon's cell. It would take but a word, a breath from me to place him at the mercy of the law; and now it remains with you to decide whether he shall be saved or not. *You* can save him from the disgrace which a public exposure of what I have told you to-day would bring upon him, and you alone can save him from a convict's fate."

"How can I save him?" Pearle asked, with ashen lips, her eyes darkening with a look as of some horror but half comprehended.

What did his ominous words mean? A sickening dread was creeping through all her nerves, withering the strength in her limbs, and making her heart beat with a dull, heavy thud, which threatened to suffocate her, while strange

sounds, like the discordant clanging of bells, rang in her ears, bidding her "Save him! save him!"

Adison Cheetham leaned toward her, an eager light in his dreadful eyes.

"If," he began, "on Thursday morning, you will go to the altar with *me* instead of Richard Byrnholm—if you will speak the vows that will make you *my* wife instead of his, I will give into your hands, as soon as the ceremony is over, the proofs of his guilt, and he shall go free from this henceforward. If you refuse," he continued, in tones which seemed like red-hot hammers beating upon her brain, "he will immediately be arrested and tried for the crime of forgery, when, of course, those other facts regarding his private life will also have to be exposed. Will you be my wife and save him, or will you defy me and ruin him?"

Was there ever a proposition more fiendish than this? Could human ingenuity devise a sacrilege so diabolical? To strive to wrest a man's bride from him at the very altar—to crush every fond hope of his heart, and blight his whole future existence by one blow so terrible, so crushing!

Surely the fair girl was right when she told her lover that she felt as if the "sword of Damocles" was suspended above her head, for what impending evil could be worse than this?

Pearle stood looking at her companion for a full minute after he had concluded, her countenance a perfect blank. It seemed as if every faculty had been benumbed by his words.

"Surely you must be mad to propose such a thing to me!" she at last whispered, hoarsely.

"I am not mad," he answered, gravely.

"Then you must be a fiend in human form!"

"Perhaps," he replied, with a short, harsh laugh; "but," he added, with a strange mixture of humility, pleading, and defiance, "you shall re-create me—you shall make of me what you will, when once you are mine."

"That will *never* be!" she cried, with a gesture of unutterable disgust.

"Then Richard Byrnholm is—lost!" Adison Cheetham said, slowly, in hard, cold tones, her gesture cutting him to the quick.

"Have you no mercy? Give me the checks, and you shall have the money for them," Pearle said, her voice shaking weakly.

"None for *him*; and the checks can be redeemed *only in one way*."

"And do you think for a moment that I would sacrifice both his life-long happiness and my own, by committing the crime you propose, merely to gratify your miserable spirit of revenge?"

"You have your choice; the matter rests wholly with you," he answered, unmoved.

Pearle felt as if she must shriek aloud in despair. Ruin was staring her in the face; whichever way she turned, it seemed to hedge her about.

If she acceded to his horrible proposition, the result would be misery for both her lover and herself; if she refused, their suffering would not be lessened, for inevitable disgrace would follow, and, as a condemned felon, the separation would be just as sure and final.

Should she sacrifice herself, save his good name, and let him go free? Could she ever bring her mind to go to the altar with this vile wretch, and thus preserve Richard from the terrible consequences of the crimes with which he was charged?

If she should do it, the scandal and disgrace would all fall upon her; the world would say she had deserted him at the very altar, and blame her for ruining a good man's life. Richard would be pitied and sympathized with, and no one ever suspect the wrongs and disgrace which her act would cover.

This seemed the lesser evil of the two; for she could not for one moment endure the thought that he whom she had believed so true and noble, whom she had loved with all the strength of her strong nature—she could not bear, I say, to think that he must be shut, away from all life and beauty, behind prison bolts and bars, and drag out a miserable existence, branded with a felon's doom. But could she ever live and go through that ceremony which would make her Adison Cheetham's wife?

The chill of death seemed creeping over her, melted lead seemed pouring through her brain. Truly her case appeared very desperate.

She lifted her icy hands and pressed them hard against her throbbing temples, while her wild eyes were fixed in terror on Adison Cheetham's stern face.

"You have dared to mock me with protestations of love," she said, in hollow tones.

"It is not mockery; I love you better than my own life," he replied, passionately, his heart leaping exultantly as he saw those signs of relenting in her.

"Have you no thought of the misery I must endure if you doom me to such an existence? Have you no pity, that you bid me tear the tenderest affections from my heart and cast them to the winds? What do you imagine my future will be?"

"As bright as every good thing of earth can make it. I will devote my life to you; no sorrow, no rough breath

even, shall touch you. We will go away from every unpleasant association ; we will forget the past, and I will not spare myself for you," he urged, gazing hungrily into the beautiful, woe-smitten face.

"You will 'not spare yourself for me,'" she repeated, passionately ; "you 'love me better than life,' but not better than the horrible revenge you are contemplating."

"That I have sworn, and I must perform," he said, with glittering eyes.

"*I will not do it*—the sin, the mockery, would be too dreadful!" Pearle cried, shuddering.

He grew deathly pale at her words, and caught his breath hard.

"That is your decision, then—you will not save Richard Byrnholm?"

"I have no right to be guilty of such mockery. I cannot ruin both our lives—I had rather die!" she cried, wildly.

"If you should die, you alone would escape the misery of which you speak ; Richard Byrnholm would still go to prison," he answered, relentlessly.

"Heaven help me!" prayed poor, distracted Pearle ; then, like a hunted, wounded deer, she turned upon him, with more savageness than he had deemed her capable of. "Would you be willing to marry a woman who would hate you all her life long?"

"That could not be ; I would compel you to love me in time. Love begets love, and the power and might of mine would yet conquer you in spite of yourself," he said, his tones thrilling with intense feeling.

"Never! I should hate you with a hatred so deadly that you would tremble when you came into my presence,

and curse the day you made me pollute my lips with false vows."

"I am willing to take the risk of that," he replied, smiling.

"Great Heaven! *what* shall I do?" she wailed. Then, as if some sudden thought had come to her, she asked, vehemently: "Why will you not face Captain Byrnholm with those documents?"

"I will, when you have given me your decision to be my wife," he answered, with a quietness that assured her he felt sure of his position.

"I cannot decide—either way would forever ruin us both," Pearle returned, with a hard, dry sob. "Go, *go!*" she added, clenching her small hands until they were purple. "Go from my sight—I cannot breathe the same air with you!"

He stooped and picked up the little book, which had fallen from her lap when she arose and crossed the room, and put it away with the forged checks.

His face was very white, and his hand trembled visibly. Would he fail, after all?

"I go, as you bid me; but it will be for an officer. Have you nothing more to say to me?" he said, in constrained tones.

"No—yes—I don't know. Oh, there are only two more days! I am nearly crazed!" Pearle moaned, beating the air with her hands, and nearly worn out with her misery.

Something like pity shone for the moment on Addison Cheetham's face, as he looked upon her.

"I will go," he said, after thinking a moment. "I will give you one day in which to consider this matter, upon

condition that you promise not to speak of the nature of our interview to any one."

"I promise, only go—go, and leave me alone!"

He bowed grave acquiescence, took up his hat, and walked quietly from the room.

CHAPTER VII.

PEARLE'S PRAYER.

Pearle sat still, with bowed head and clasped hands, until she heard the great hall-door close after her tormentor, and the sound of his horse's hoofs upon the graveled drive-way as he rode away. Then she arose and tottered to her chamber, where, locking herself in, she sat down and tried to comprehend this dreadful thing that had overtaken her at the moment when life had seemed at its brightest. It could not be possible, she moaned in her misery, that Richard Byrnholm was the hypocrite he had just been represented. He *could* not be so false to every principle of truth and honor as to have won the love of a pure woman, deceiving her, ruining her, and then turning from her, to make her—Pearle Radcliffe—his second victim; for such she would surely become if, at ever so late a day, she had discovered these dreadful things regarding him.

"I cannot believe it—I will not believe it!" she cried aloud, with clasped hands uplifted in agony, tearless sobs heaving her bosom and exhausting her strength, as hour after hour, refusing the repeated calls of the London mil-

liner and her maid, she walked the floor, like some restless, caged animal. "It cannot be true. His eyes never fell before mine; they are clear and tranquil as deep, pure pools of water. His smile is frank and true; his voice has no sound of treachery in it. He *could* not do such dark deeds."

Still she knew those checks had been tampered with; *some* one had changed the amounts they represented. That was a fact she could not dispute; and if they were cashed, and the fraud discovered, Richard Byrnholm alone would be obliged to suffer the consequences.

"Oh! if I had but kept them," she cried, remorsefully; "he would have been safe from all danger of arrest on their account. But that would not have mitigated my misery; the doubt would still have existed. And that book—that dreadful book! How can I live and believe what that proves?"

Ah! she had confessed it. In the privacy of her own room she had uttered what she would have suffered tortures rather than have acknowledged in the presence of Adison Cheetham.

She could not doubt that the writing in that little expense book was Richard Byrnholm's very own. He must have made each separate entry, and, accordingly, he must have paid out the money which those figures represented, and for the purposes there designated.

What could debts of honor mean but money lost in gambling? She shuddered at the word; but Pearle was not one to leave anything half done—this matter must be thoroughly considered and sifted before she could rest.

"It is better to know all this now than three days later," she said; but the words ended with a wail so hopeless and

so bitter that it would have caused one with a heart of stone to weep in sympathy to hear.

What could "family expenses at the Dove-cote" mean, but that Richard was secretly supporting some person or persons belonging in some way to him?

Her cheeks grew hot with shame and anger at the thought, her eyes bright and glittering with a feeling she had never before experienced.

"Ariel" was a fair, beautiful woman; she was the "dove" for whom *her* lover—*her* betrothed husband—had prepared the beautiful little nest! That lovely face had, perhaps, rested upon his bosom—upon the very spot where her own had so often laid. He had kissed the sweet lips, looked fondly into the deep blue eyes, and caressed the golden hair. The same arms that had so often infolded her had clasped this other graceful form—oh! it was too dreadful to think about.

And "Ritchie"—the black-eyed, black-haired, rosy-cheeked cherub—possessing these characteristics of every male member of the Byrnholm family whom she had ever seen—he was this fair Ariel's child, and—and——

Ah! the bitterness of that poor, breaking heart, as she sank, shuddering, to the floor with the crushing suspicion to which she could not give form or expression.

Then all her pride awoke and arose to battle. She was consumed with jealousy, her heart was breaking with its anguish; but no man should cheat her thus and triumph in his hypocrisy and wickedness.

"Where is my spirit that I should tamely submit to this outrage?" she cried, passionately, all the blood in her body boiling with indignation. "If he has been guilty of these things; if Ariel is—belongs—to him, then he

could also be guilty of forgery. *If* it is all true, I will not spare him.

"If," she repeated, starting to her feet again, the look as of some sudden purpose settling over her face. "Yes; *I will do it!*"

She had resolved that she would go and see for herself if Adison Cheetham's words were true.

She knew well the little lane that led from the Uppingham road; she could go there by herself to this tiny, vine-clad cottage—this pretty dove-cote. She would manage some way to see Ariel and this beautiful, black-eyed boy, who so resembled the man she loved.

She could not go to-night; it was already getting late, and time for the family and guests to return, and more company was expected in the evening. Richard himself was coming also, and Adison Cheetham too would be there to spy upon all her movements.

She could not go to-morrow either, for Richard had planned that they were all to go over to Linden Grange to inspect and pass judgment upon the beautiful home he had prepared with so much care and pride for his bride, and which was now complete in every appointment.

Pearle's lips curled with scorn and pain as she thought of this.

Should she ever go there now to live? Could she ever enter that perfect abode with this poisoned thorn in her heart? No. If what she now learned were true, she would never be Richard Byrnholm's wife, never cross the threshold at Linden Grange; and yet she knew she loved him to idolatry, and even were her worst fears confirmed, should so continue to love him to the end of her life.

But the wedding-day was appointed, some of the guests

had already arrived, more would come on the morrow, and what could she do?

A hundred times she was tempted to brave all Adison Cheetham's threats, fly to Richard, and seek a frank, straightforward explanation of it all.

But she had promised she would not; and there was a faint hope in her heart, which she clung to, that she might herself discover it all a cleverly devised fraud, on their enemy's part, to ruin their happiness.

"I do not know how I can arrange it," she sighed, wearily, as she heard her brother's voice outside, and knew that the party had returned from Lord Cumbermede's. "I shall have to watch my opportunity, but go I must to that little dwelling and see its inmates before Thursday. Oh! no wonder I told Richard last night that I feared some evil was about to overtake us," she concluded, shuddering.

She arose and bathed her face to remove the traces of her emotion, and then dressing herself with unusual care, went down to join the guests at dinner, trusting that by candle-light no one would remark her lusterless eyes and exceeding pallor.

But the fair bride-elect was the cynosure of all eyes, and more than one exclaimed at her ill looks.

"I have a headache," she said, wearily—and a heart-ache also, she might truthfully have added.

Richard came, as she had expected, during the evening, and with him the treacherous being who called himself his friend, to watch that Pearle should have no opportunity to confide his assertions to him.

Pearle's eyes searched her lover's face when he came, as if her last hope depended on what she might read there.

There was no consciousness of guilt upon that broad,

open brow, no lurking evil in the clear, bright, laughing eyes, and her confidence in him for the moment returned.

"It cannot be," she thought within herself; "he *could* not be guilty of anything so monstrous. If I had but kept those checks, I could have confided all this trouble to him before I sleep, and been at rest. I will arrange some way to-morrow to go to the Dove-cote, and if I find that that wretch has deceived me in the smallest particular, I will brave the worst and tell Richard."

But Adison Cheetham managed it so that they scarce saw each other during the evening. Only a moment at parting did Richard find an opportunity to whisper a few fond words in her ear.

"You look ill, beloved," he said, drawing her into the hall. "Does the sword still hang suspended above your head?" he asked, playfully.

Her heart bounded like a thing of life at his words.

Surely no man steeped in guilt and crime could speak and look thus.

She tried to smile, and her lips quivered slightly. If only she had dared to throw herself into his arms and sob out her wretchedness to him!

"If only the 'hair' will not break, there is no danger," she said, trying to speak lightly; but, oh! how terribly significant were the words to her—how slender the hair that suspended the sword!

Richard laughed, as he bent and touched her lips with more than his wonted fondness.

"Sleep well to-night, my darling," he whispered. "I shall come for you to-morrow and take you to see the nest I have prepared for you; and a fitting one, I hope, it will prove to be, my Pearle, my precious wife—almost."

He had not time to say more, for Adison Cheetham's

evil face appeared in the door-way, an anxious expression upon it.

He gave Pearle a warning glance, as if to bid her beware and not violate her promise to him. He then made his adieus, and departed with his friend, while Pearle again sought her own rooms, to battle anew with her fears and suspicions, her jealousy and indignation.

One wild desire possessed her—in some way she must see the inmates of the Dove-cote; but how to accomplish it was the question which tried her sorely.

All day to-morrow she would be occupied—first at Linden Grange, and afterward with the constantly arriving guests. But the evening, the last night before her bridal, she might claim for herself; she might reasonably ask to be left alone, and no one would think strange of it.

Then she would steal forth from the house, saddle her pony, gallop to that little cottage in the lane leading from the Uppingham road, and see for herself—what she would see.

Pearle Radcliffe had never been in the habit of praying much; she had never been taught to believe that all she had came from the hands of a provident Father of love for His child.

True, she had regularly attended Sabbath-school and the services of the church every Lord's day, and given respectful attention to what she heard there, while, as a child, her frail mother had taught her to lisp a form of prayer. This, however, as she grew older, had been dropped, as being too simple and childish for her maturer years. Her brother's household was not altogether a reverent one, and so the poor child was far astray from the path where her feet should have walked.

To-night, oppressed by her trouble and fears, some-

thing of this seemed to be impressed upon her, and when she was ready for her rest, she knelt before her couch in the attitude of prayer, as if feeling the need of a stronger arm than her own to lean upon, where the way looked so dark.

It was not a prayer of faith that went up from Pearle Radcliffe's heart—it was a wild, passionate, selfish supplication that her life might not be ruined, that the cup which she had believed brimming with happiness, and which was already at her lips, might not be dashed from them before she had drunk of its contents.

“Grant,” she cried, “that he whom I love may prove the faithful, the true, good man I have always believed him to be! Send anything upon me—I can bear *anything*, save the knowledge that he is false. Prove him to be but true and noble—no other trial shall seem too hard for me to bear.”

A few weeks later she wondered that she could ever have been guilty of addressing such language—such a selfish, unholy prayer—to the One in whose hands lie the destinies of all men.

But she was being led in a way she knew not, and it was only when the deep waters rolled over her that she began to realize that Pearle Radcliffe—the proud, willful, but petted darling of fortune and friends, whose pleasure and desires she had all her life been taught to regard as paramount to all else—was no greater than any other weak mortal who needed the Great Teacher to guide her life aright; and when at length that prayer was answered, though not in the way she had hoped, she realized, too, how infinite the wisdom that had directed her straying steps.

CHAPTER VIII.

L I N D E N G R A N G E .

Wednesday morn—the morning before Pearle's wedding—was a day of fairest, brightest beauty.

"Auntie! Auntie Pearle! look out; God is smiling," called a sweet voice just beneath Pearle's window.

She was nearly dressed, and she put her face out among the vines that clambered around it, and looked down into the sweet, upturned countenance of her little niece—a witch, roguish and mischievous, but winsome and lovable as possible, was this little one of four summers, with her clear, laughing brown eyes, and dancing, chestnut curls.

"See!" she added, glancing about her; "He is smiling *everywhere*."

And so it seemed to Pearle. The glad earth appeared gilded with something more than its usual glory.

The sun came rolling up in stately majesty, one huge mass of blazing, scintillating fire, everywhere distributing its beautifying beams on its way, and making the great vault above seem like some immense gilded dome faintly tinged with blue. The fresh green carpet beneath, the darker emerald, and crimson and gold of the foliage above, glittered as with countless points of flame. The waving grain, the budding and blooming flowers of a thousand varied hues, had, as it were, been touched with magic loveliness on this particular morning.

From tree-top and hill-top, from valley and fen, hundreds of birds trilled forth their glad anthems of praise

and joy, until it seemed as if the very air was laden with angelic music.

Pearle gathered some of the late, full-blown roses from the vine at her window and pelted the little one beneath, until she laughed aloud in her childish glee, making a pretty picture, in her dainty white garments, against the emerald sward, and causing the air to ring with her merriment. Then the nurse came and took her away, and Pearle, still leaning on the window-sill, let her eyes rove again over the scene of beauty before her.

"No one has a right to be unhappy on such a glad morning as this," she murmured, drawing in a long breath of the invigorating air.

The night had been a long one to her; restless and nervous, she had tossed upon her couch, beset with a thousand haunting fears and fancies, while, when she did at last sleep, her dreams were but a series of battlings with some invisible foes.

"I will be happy for this one day," she cried, with sudden resolution. "I will not be troubled by anything to-day; I will be Pearle Radcliffe, favored and honored, with nothing but happiness and a joyous future in prospect. I will be as bright and glad as this lovely morning, casting care to the winds. No sorrow shall mar the next twelve hours, no distrust nor suspicion shall haunt me with their gaunt shadows. I will be gay, and happy, and free throughout this fair day; and then——"

She suppressed the involuntary sigh that rose to her lips, and turned to the glass to give the few last touches to her toilet, resolutely trilling a fragment of a merry song.

She had dressed herself in a bewitching robe of palest blue, with tiny ruffles of lace at the throat and wrists. Not an ornament was visible about her, save the rare ring and

its guard which Richard Byrnholm had placed upon her left hand as the seal of their engagement.

She went to the window again, plucked a handful of half-blown rosebuds, and arranged them at her throat and in her belt.

An innocent smile of pleasure at her own loveliness came to her red lips as she caught her reflection in the glass, a delicate color crept into her cheeks, and the old merry light returned to her eyes.

She was a delight to behold, as she resolutely left her troubles behind her and went down to join her friends at breakfast.

"There comes Pearle, and some witch has cast a 'beauty-spell' about her while she slept," cried Kate Griffith, a merry girl, who was to be one of the bride-maids to-morrow, and she sprang to meet her as she came slowly down the grand staircase.

"Nay, that was cast upon her in her cradle, and every day has only served to enhance it," retorted Guy Strathmere, Miss Griffith's betrothed; whereupon that blooming young lady playfully pouted at him for having presumed to pay another such a compliment in her presence.

"'Happy is the bride that the sun shines upon,' and I trust that this fair day is but the harbinger of to-morrow, and of all your life, my Pearle," said her brother, bending down to touch her forehead with his customary greeting.

Her lovely face grew brighter at these words. Everybody was so bright and merry this morning that her own heart became lighter in sympathy with every moment.

"It is a perfect day, and ominous, I trust, of the life that awaits you," said fair Alice Arnaut, a heavenly-eyed, spiritual-looking girl, and Pearle's own particular friend.

She slipped her arm around the gentle speaker's waist,

drawing her to her in a close, affectionate clasp, and smiled fondly, as she whispered her thanks for the prettily spoken wish.

But the observant Alice thought she saw the scarlet lips tremble, notwithstanding their smile.

"If only some good-natured witch will be so accommodating as to transform us all into beauties to-night while we sleep, how *be-witch*-ing we shall be to-morrow," laughed the merry Kate, with a saucy glance at her lover.

"One would think that no wedding under the sun has been what this one is to be," said Charlotte Breton, another of the bride-maids to be, and who had been invited to serve in that capacity simply because of her connection with the family.

She had bloomed unheeded for several years, no appreciative lover having yet appeared to "cull the flower from its parent stem," and the fair damsel's disposition had become somewhat soured from that fact, and all weddings nowadays were a thorn in the flesh to her.

From the first she had envied Pearle on account of her rich and handsome lover, and the brilliant future apparently awaiting her, and she spoke now with considerable bitterness.

"Don't be too sure," she continued, ominously, "that Pearle is to be more especially favored than any other bride; and, above all, don't invoke any witches' spells, or we shall all be sure to come to grief."

"Be still, thou croaker!" cried the sprightly, irrepressible Kate; "breathe not a single ominous word on this fair day. If you are not fond of witches, call them fairies, elves, sprites—but, hark! there is the breakfast-bell, and I'm not sure but that I want something rather more substantial than what our dainty elfin friends can give us."

With a light, musical laugh she slipped her hand within Pearle's unoccupied arm, and the three beautiful girls passed through the hall to the breakfast-room, followed by the rest of the party.

Miss Griffith had noticed Pearle's sudden pallor, and the quickly drawn breath which followed Miss Breton's ill-natured words, and tried thus to efface their sting.

It was a merry company that sat down to breakfast in the roomy apartment used on state occasions in Ashton Manor, and the lofty walls rang again and again with mirth and the music of joyous, happy voices; while Pearle, with whom to resolve was to perform, was not the least vivacious one among the company.

Men and maids peeped in at the doors as they passed about their several duties to get a bit of the fun, and wished that there might be a wedding every year in the grand old house, if it could be filled with such gayety and good cheer as now.

Not long after breakfast, Richard Byrnholm and his friend—for such he must be termed for the present—arrived, to escort the party to Linden Grange.

The young people were all out upon the lawn, and as the two men rode up the shaded drive-way, Richard's fine eyes met those of his betrothed with a fondness and pride that made her heart bound and thrill as it had never done before.

"He is *not* false," she whispered to herself, as, leaving her friends, she went forward to meet him.

"What beauty-dispensing spirit has touched you this morning, my dazzling Pearle? I never saw you so fair before," he whispered, bending from his saddle that no one else might catch the words.

Her scarlet lips parted in a radiant smile, the delicate

color deepened in her cheek, and her glorious eyes met his with all their old fond trust, as she answered :

“That spirit's name must be ‘Love,’ I think, since I resolved this morning that I would enjoy to the full all with which it surrounds me. I was sad and depressed yesterday and the day before, but to-day I have vowed to be glad, to let no thought of evil trouble me, to bask in the joy of the present, love my love as fondly as I choose, hope for all things bright in the future, ignoring the past, and allowing coming events to care for themselves.”

She had spoken gayly and lightly, with a smile on her lips and a merry sparkle in her eyes, and she tried to believe all that she said ; but down deep in her heart she knew that she was only trying to brace herself against the invisible *foe* that she felt was advancing steadily upon her.

“If such a resolve will always make you so fair, my darling, I pray you make it every morning. Now, dear, I would not mar the picture I love so well to gaze upon, but I must have those roses in your belt,” Richard answered, in his own gay strain.

“You shall have them, Richard ; but—I shall not subscribe to their language,” Pearle answered, laughing, as she unfastened them to give to him.

“And what is that?” he asked, bending nearer to the bright, flushing face.

“Thou hast stolen my affections.”

“And have I not?”

“No ; I freely gave them. Get down from your horse, and I will pin my buds to your coat.”

She lifted them to her face as if to inhale their fragrance, but he saw her lips touch them with a mute caress, and his heart swelled with a rapture that was almost pain, that

this peerlessly beautiful woman belonged to him with all the love of her rich nature.

He sprang from his horse, longing to clasp her in his arms and repay her then and there for the sweet words she had spoken.

She arranged the flowers with a tender care, and then, with graceful deliberation, pinned them securely to his coat, even though she knew that Adison Cheetham, having exchanged greetings with the company, was now approaching them.

She pretended not to see him at all, but moved off a step or two, her bright head a little inclined to one side, like some bright bird, as if to admire the work of her deft fingers.

They made a pretty picture standing there, with the noble bay horse for a background. The bridle was thrown loosely over Richard's arm, and his stalwart, finely proportioned form contrasted favorably with the slender, graceful figure of the lovely girl in her delicately tinted robes, her fair hands fluttering among the flowers on his breast like some white-winged dove.

They all noticed it, and spoke of it. Adison Cheetham saw it, too, and with exceeding bitterness in his heart. He could never hope to be loved in all his life as this bright and charming girl loved Richard Byrnholm.

"Ah! Miss Radcliffe, you have faultless taste," he said, as he joined the lovers, and his eyes rested on the dainty *boutonniere*. He always called her Miss Radcliffe before Richard.

"Yes, I think I have, if I might always be allowed to exercise it *in my own way*," Pearle remarked, dryly, as, turning, with a little gesture of defiance, she took her lover's arm, and they began to walk toward the house.

The villain bit his lips with vexation at this shaft, and there was a baleful gleam in his eyes as he more slowly followed the handsome couple.

Half an hour later a gay cavalcade dashed down the broad drive-way, Richard Byrnholm and his betrothed leading the way toward Linden Grange.

Adison Cheetham had cleverly managed so that he rode directly behind them with Miss Charlotte Breton, feeling sure that Pearle would not dare make any confidential communications with him so near, and he had determined to keep a sharp eye upon all her proceedings that day.

Arriving at Linden Grange—so called from the mammoth Linden trees that bordered on either side the avenue leading to the mansion—grooms were in waiting to take the horses, and the party dismounted and entered the house.

It was not a particularly imposing structure outwardly, but had a substantial, home-like look that was very attractive. It had been put in thorough repair, and was as fresh, and clean, and beautiful as a heavy purse and a devoted heart could make it.

Every apartment had undergone a complete renovation; everything was in its proper place, and the taste and thoughtfulness displayed by the happy possessor did him great credit.

The rooms which chiefly interested the ladies were the drawing-rooms and Pearle's own private apartments.

These latter were pronounced by every one to be "perfect gems." The cozy parlor, or boudoir, with its double glass doors opening upon a balcony which commanded a magnificent view, was indeed a delightful room. The furnishings were all new, and so delicately elegant. The carpet was of a pearl-gray ground, with clusters of rich

fuchsias intermingling with fine running vines and variegated mosses. The furniture, of light and graceful pattern, was upholstered in silk to match the ground of the carpet with raised velvet flowers like those upon the floor. Beautiful little tables were here and there; an *etagerie* of exquisite design, and furnished with every accessory, was the especial delight of every one. Beautiful vases of silver, and porcelain, and cut glass were scattered everywhere, and all filled with lovely flowers, plainly telling of the loving hand that had arranged them. Lovely pictures—not too many nor too large, but each one a gem—adorned the pearly tinted walls. Silken curtain of pink to match the fuchsias in the carpet, and just shaded by misty lace, were looped from the large windows with heavy cord and tassels.

The chamber beyond was furnished throughout in the same delicate tints; also the dressing-room, which was a marvel of luxury, even to the numberless toilet articles, which were of pink and white Sevres china, and were all marked, in Grecian letters, "Pearle."

Standing at one end of the dressing-room and looking down through the whole suite, it seemed like some enchanting vision of loveliness.

"Pearle, what a jewel of a husband you will have, and won't you be perfectly happy here!" said Kate Griffith, who had been enthusiastic in her praise of everything.

"I certainly hope to be, Kate," Pearle answered, very gravely, though a cold chill settled upon her heart, and a terrible fear clouded her face for a moment.

She had been deeply touched at the thoughtfulness and the delicate attention that had everywhere been paid to her wishes and tastes. Surely none but a strong, true love could have thus turned everything into beauty for her.

"It is easy to judge from all this what color his royal highness likes best to have you surrounded by," remarked Miss Charlotte Breton, with an ill-concealed sneer, as she glanced around the rose-tinted apartments.

It did not please her to see everything that heart could desire being thus showered upon this pale, proud girl of only nineteen, while she, at twenty-six, had only a limited income, and was without a single attendant to boast of, or even care what tint was most becoming to her rather questionable complexion.

"It is evident, I think, that Captain Byrnholm considers Pearle will look well in any setting, judging from the varied hues with which he has furnished his home. There are drawing-rooms in old gold and gleaming white, as rich as anything I ever saw; the library in warm, bright crimson; the dining-room furnished in exquisitely carved oak and blue plush; the reception-rooms in green and gold, and the visitors' apartments in various other tints, in either of which Pearle will gleam as fair and pure as the gem for which she is named," said Alice Arnaut, with a fond glance at her friend.

"Foolish child!" cried Pearle, with one of her brilliant smiles. "Do you think I am going to stand here and listen to such flattery and silly speeches? Come, I hear the gentlemen below; let us go down into the library;" and winding her arm about Alice's slight waist, she led the way down stairs.

They found all the gentlemen gathered in the richly furnished library, examining the choice books and rare works of art collected there.

Richard was standing by his desk as they entered, hurriedly turning over a pile of papers that lay there; and

Pearle, as she moved toward him, thought he looked flushed and troubled about something.

CHAPTER IX.

WORDS OF WARNING.

"What are you looking for, Richard?" Adison Cheetham asked, coming forward just before Pearle reached him.

"For a little memorandum book that I thought I left lying here yesterday," he replied, still continuing his search, the lines of anxiety deepening on his face.

"What sort of a looking book was it?" asked the cunning villain, catching sight of Pearle's whitening face.

"It was about eight inches long by six broad, and had a black morocco cover. It was very careless in me to leave it lying about, but I was called out in a hurry, and then forgot to come and put it away before I went to town."

Pearle, standing just behind him, heard all this, though it was intended only for his friend's ear, and her heart gave a great wild bound of agony, for too well she knew, or thought she knew, to what book he referred.

Adison Cheetham made no reply, but took up another pile of letters and papers and began to look them over, while he furtively watched the young girl out of the corner of his eye.

"Can this be it, Richard?" he asked, after a moment, appearing to separate a little black-covered book from the mass which he was looking over, and holding it out to him.

Richard Byrnholm looked up quickly, and the troubled expression instantly faded from his face.

"Yes, Ad; that is it. How glad I am to find it! I would not have lost it on any account. Yes"—opening it, and letting the pages slip through his fingers—"this is the very book; but how could it have got mixed up with those papers, I wonder?"

His friend made no reply to this, and he hastily opened a small drawer, placed it within, shut it, locked it, and put the key in his pocket.

Pearle had grown as white as a snow-flake, and now turned and walked to a window, to hide the sudden trembling with which she had been seized.

That book *was* his, then; there could be no doubt of it; he had owned it in her presence and Adison Cheetham's. The worry had all faded out of his face when he saw it—he was "so glad to find it;" he "would not have lost it for anything."

What could she think? Must she believe that her almost husband, the man whom she had so loved and set upon a pinnacle far above his fellow-men, was a traitor, a libertine, and a gambler?

And yet when he spoke to her, when he looked at her, she would have been willing to stake her soul against his purity and truth.

She could not fathom this dark mystery. She grew faint, dizzy, heart-sick, and leaned her aching head against the cool glass of the window for support and to still the throbbing pain.

Adison Cheetham quietly worked his way around to her side, while Richard was busy showing a portfolio of engravings to some of their friends.

"You heard?" he said, significantly, in a low tone.

She made a gesture of impatience and repulsion. He frowned, but continued :

"You heard him own it ; you cannot doubt now. Will you choose? You cannot marry such a villain, knowing all that you do?"

"That, I suppose, is optional with myself," she tried to say, with something of her old spirit ; but he saw that she was suffering torture.

"Do not deceive yourself. If you *ever* marry him, it will not be to-morrow ; for—I swear it—you shall be separated at the very altar. Give me the promise I seek, or the consequences be upon your own head," he whispered, warningly.

She longed to cry aloud and ease the numbing pain at her heart. She shook in every limb ; she felt as if her senses were leaving her. She must be alone for a while and compose herself, or she would be the mark of every eye in the room.

"I cannot decide now—not now," she said, with white lips ; and noiselessly pushing open the window, she stepped out upon the lawn, and disappeared among the trees.

Adison Cheetham was half tempted to follow her, but he did not upon second thought.

Her last words had given him more hope than he had dared to dream of before.

"Not now," she had said, showing that the thought had been in her heart, and there was a possibility that he might win at last.

"Not now, but to-morrow at this time she will be mine," he said, exultingly, as he turned his attention to the other guests, and for half an hour made himself so entertaining that Pearle's absence was not remarked by them.

But Richard missed her after a time, and quietly withdrew to seek her. He came upon her sitting in a little rustic arbor at the foot of a shaded walk. There was a look of horror in her eyes that startled him; her lips were perfectly hueless, and her cheeks like marble.

"Pearle, my darling, what is it?" he demanded, alarmed.

"A little dizzy turn. I thought if I came out by myself I should get over it quietly without disturbing any one," she returned, but her voice was hollow and unnatural.

She arose, as if to return to the house. She knew but too well that Adison Cheetham would follow them; and, besides, her brain was in such a whirl that she could not talk now, even if she was disposed to confide in him.

But Richard drew her fondly within his arms, kissed her white face, and then regarded her anxiously.

"How glad I shall be to get you away from all this worry and excitement, my own!" he said. "We will go somewhere for a while, and be just as quiet as we can be. You are growing pale and hollow-eyed, my love, and yet I thought I never saw you so beautiful as you were this morning."

"Is it my beauty you love?" Pearle asked, scarce knowing what she said, she was so absorbed in considering whether she dare, after all, confess to him what was troubling her.

He laughed his free, careless laugh as he tightened his clasp about her.

"My love," he said, with such a true, earnest look in his eyes, "yesterday, while I was in London, I bought for your bridal gift a set of jewels. I chose those that had rich and beautiful settings, for only such are fit for rare and costly gems. But, dear, the settings without their gems would be comparatively worthless. You are beautiful,

Pearle—I love to look upon your beauty—but that alone would not satisfy me; it is the pure, true soul that shines through it, enhancing it, that I love.”

“You do believe me pure and true, then—you have full faith in me?” she cried, clinging to him and trembling.

“Assuredly, my darling. How strange of you to ask me that, at this late hour! Can anything have disturbed *your* faith in *me*?” he asked, with a puzzled look into her troubled face.

“Oh, Richard! I love you—I love you!” she sobbed, passionately.

“Margaret,” Richard Byrnholm said, with grave reproof, but with infinite tenderness, “something troubles you—you have evaded my question. Now tell me what all this pallor, this sorrow and trembling means.”

He pushed her gently back into the chair from which she had risen, and gathering her cold, trembling hands in his, waited for her to tell him.

She looked up into his face. There was nothing false there. No truer light had ever gleamed in the eye of man than in that which was looking so steadily and tenderly into her own.

A wild resolve took possession of her. She would tell him everything. Why had she not done so before, she wondered? Why had she distrusted and wronged him so, and listened instead to the vile insinuations of his enemy?

“I will tell you, Richard,” she began, half the burden slipping from her heart with her wise resolve. “You know——” She stopped, with a start, and uttered an impatient cry. “Oh! there is that dreadful man again; he haunts me like some grim specter.”

Richard looked up and saw Adison Cheetham approaching, and his own brow clouded with vexation.

He realized for the first time that always, of late, when he had attempted to say a few words alone to his betrothed, he was sure to be interrupted by his friend. It was annoying truly, but he did not attribute the circumstance to anything intentional on his part.

"I am sorry, dear, that we should be interrupted," he said, soothingly; "but I will see you again, if possible. At all events, to-morrow you will have a right to tell me everything that troubles you, and no one will interfere."

"No; *please*, Richard, I must tell you *now*. Send him away, and let me tell you now," she pleaded, wearily.

"That would be hardly civil, Pearle, when I can see you any time. You are tired and nervous; we will go back to the house and have some luncheon, after which you shall tell me all that troubles you."

He took her hand and laid it upon his arm to lead her away, just as Adison Cheetham reached the entrance to the arbor.

He had brought a message from the housekeeper, he said, that luncheon was ready to be served, and the guests were waiting for them.

He darted an angry, warning look at Pearle. Something told him that he had been just in season to prevent a disclosure.

He felt convinced that no danger had been done, since Richard's manner toward him was unchanged; but he swore he would not lose sight of either of them again that day.

Richard led Pearle to the dining-room, and seated her at a little table in a sunny bay-window, and devoted himself to her with all the delicate care he knew so well how

to bestow, and thus shielded her from the notice of the company.

He succeeded in talking a tinge of color back to her cheek and something of the old light to her eyes, and once he even made her laugh outright by relating an amusing incident that had occurred during his absence the previous day.

The other guests were in the gayest of spirits, and the hour passed most merrily.

But Adison Cheetham watched, with the eye of a lynx, every motion of that pair by the little table in the bay-window, while scarce a mouthful of that tempting lunch passed his lips.

Pearle noticed it, but she did not care; she was growing calmer every moment. She had made up her mind now that she would not sleep until she had confessed all his villainy, and her own suspicions, to her lover.

She had made up her mind, I say; but, ah! how little a thing sometimes serves to change the current of our whole lives.

"You are better, my Pearle," Richard whispered, when lunch was over, and they were leaving the dining-room. "Come into the library, and I will let you read something about 'magnified fears,' while you rest a while longer and I attend to ordering the horses."

Smiling archly into her brightening face, he was leading her toward the library, when some one spoke to him in the hall.

"I will be with you in a moment," he called, without stopping.

He found her an easy-chair; then went and brought a little book that had been lying on his desk. He was about

turning to the page he wanted, when Adison Cheetham's voice called from the door-way :

"Richard, some one wants you outside."

"Yes, yes," he returned, impatiently; then putting the book into Pearle's hand, he said, laughing: "I am in great demand, you perceive. You will find what I referred to on the one hundred and twentieth page, I think;" then he went out, and left her sitting there alone.

Absently she toyed with the book for a moment; then it suddenly fell open at a page where there appeared to be a marker. It was not the one hundred and twentieth, however; it was the fiftieth, and Pearle never forgot how it looked as long as she lived.

There was writing on the marker, which was nothing more than a slip of paper, and before she was conscious of the fact, she had read the words penned there—read them, and seemed suddenly turned to stone.

"DEAR RICHARD: Come to me once more, if only for a few moments, before you go. ARIEL."

She rose from her chair as if impelled by some resistless motive power as she read those delicately written words—rose up, crushing the slip of paper in her white hand, while the book went spinning unheeded across the floor. She was like some beautifully chiseled statue, her lips curling with scorn, her eyes flashing with anger and outraged affection.

"I will tell him *nothing!*" she cried, lifting her proud head with an air of haughty defiance. "I will go myself and *see*—I will tell *no* one; and then, if it is true——" She reeled at the thought, and stretched out her hand to the mantel for support; but the look of pride returned to her face almost immediately. "If it is true," she repeated, "then he shall suffer as I have suffered."

She thrust that bit of crushed paper into the depths of her pocket, then gathering up the trailing skirt of her habit, she swept from the room with a firm, proud tread. She met Richard in the great hall.

"Did you get tired waiting?" he asked, smiling. "I was just coming to 'confess' you," he added, playfully.

"There is no need—I am not in a penitential mood now," she answered, making an effort to reply in the same strain.

"Ah! my little poem on 'magnified fears' has dispelled the mood, perhaps?"

"Yes; what I read has banished it," she returned, dryly, with a searching look into his face.

They were joined by others of the party now, and there was no time to say more; but there was a sense of unrest and perplexity in Richard Byrnholm's heart such as he had never experienced before during all his engagement to Pearle. He had never seen her appear so strangely before, but he laid it to weariness and nervousness, and tried to think that all would be well after to-morrow. He and his friend accompanied the party back to Ashton Manor, and remained to dinner.

Pearle exerted herself to appear her best—no one should suspect the bitterness that was gnawing at her heart-strings. She was brilliant and merry during the evening; and, dressed in trailing robes of rose-colored silk, heavily corded with white, with white moss-roses at her neck and in her glossy braids, she was more exquisitely lovely than it is possible to describe.

No one ever forgot the dazzling beauty who was the life of the whole company on that last evening before that strange wedding at Ashton Manor.

Richard took an early leave, saying, in a laughing way,

that it was her last evening of freedom, and he would allow her to spend it as she chose, unchecked by his watchful eye. Besides, he added, he had a little matter of business that must be attended to before the morrow.

A little matter of business! The words pierced her like an arrow. It was, doubtless, connected with Ariel and her child; she had written him to "come."

As soon as possible after his departure, Pearle excused herself to the guests, and left the drawing-room. As she passed through the hall and was about ascending the stairs, Adison Cheetham presented himself before her, hat in hand, as if to make his adieus.

"Have you decided?" he demanded, in low, stern tones.

"No," she briefly returned.

"But you *will* decide to-night—you will be my wife to-morrow?"

"You are mad! *I—your* wife!" she cried, with curling lips and flashing eyes.

She was glorious in her proud, angry beauty, and he was more than ever determined to win her.

"No; it is *you* who are mad, because you refuse to save the man whom you profess to love. You can save him only in one way. You may defy me if you dare; the consequences will be upon your own head and his. He may meet you at the church—you may go with him to the altar railing; but before you can say the words that shall make you his wife, he will be arrested, and no power shall save him from a felon's fate. Will you see him hurled into disgrace, from which he can never recover? Can you bear to know that he will wear out his life in a dungeon, or that, should he live to emerge from it, he could never resume his old place among men, but live and die branded with infamy? Can you bear all this—you, who *say* you

love him—or will you save him? You alone, I tell you, can do it.”

His words had been swift and fierce, burning into her brain like a hot iron.

“Oh, heavens!” she cried, clutching at the baluster for support. “What spirit of evil sent you hither?”

“Hush!” he cried, sharply; “no one must suspect this. I give you one last chance. Think of what I have said to-night; and, mark me, I will surely carry out my purpose. But I will give you all the time there is. I will not press you further now, but I will meet you at the church, at eleven, to-morrow. An officer in her majesty’s service will be there also, to do his duty in case you fail me. You will go to the altar with *me*, instead of Richard Byrnholm. I have already procured the special license necessary——”

She put out her hand with a gesture of horror at this; but he continued, without appearing to notice it:

“Of course such a proceeding will occasion much remark and scandal; but we can fly from it all, and be free from all unpleasant speeches.”

“Who—*what* are you? There never was a more fiendish plot contrived since Lucifer rebelled in heaven,” Pearle said, in tones of mingled horror and hatred. “To ruin the life of a man who has been so staunch a friend to you, and to compel me to such a confederate act, is too horrible to contemplate.”

“You can choose the only alternative if you see fit,” he answered, moodily.

“I realize that fact,” she returned, bitterly, yet in such tones of anguish that he took courage.

“I shall bring those forged checks to the church, and

the moment you are my wife they shall be yours, to do with as you will."

"Give them to me now," she cried, eagerly.

"No, no, my fair Pearle. I was very careless in allowing you to get them into your possession the other day. I shall not trust them with you again until after eleven to-morrow," he replied, significantly.

"What do you expect to gain if I consent to the sacrifice you propose?"

"The loveliest bride in all England," he said, with an eager look into her face.

"Listen to me!" she commanded, leaning toward him, and almost transfixing him with the strange gleam that had come into her eyes. "If you drive me to this thing—mind, I do not say that you *will*—but if you do, I warn you that you shall live to repent it in dust and ashes."

She did not give him a second in which to reply, but, turning, she fled like a flash of light up the stairs; and, with a moody face and a frowning brow, he silently left the house. That last night was not a tranquil one for him.

CHAPTER X.

WHAT PEARLE SAW.

Pearle, after leaving Adison Cheetham, sped to her own room, panting and trembling in every limb. But there was no time to give way to her own feelings now; she had other work to do.

With eager haste she removed her rich robes, and again

donned her riding-habit, knotted a heavy scarf around her throat, tied a thick veil about her face; then, with wide, staring eyes, and teeth that chattered with nervousness, she sped down a back staircase that was seldom used, and let herself out by a side door.

She flew to the stable where her horse was kept. He was in a box stall, to which she had a key; and as she turned it in the lock, a gentle whinney told her that she had been recognized by the intelligent brute.

It was but the work of a few seconds to get his bridle and saddle and put them on. She had been taught how, when quite a young girl, at her own request, and the knowledge served her well now.

There was no one about the stables; the servants belonging there had all performed their allotted duties, and were now in the kitchen, making merry in anticipation of the morrow's festivities.

She next strewed the floor with some straw, to deaden the sound of her horse's hoofs, led him quietly forth, and sprang into the saddle.

Avoiding the graveled drive-way, she guided him along the softer turf until she reached the highway; then, touching him lightly with her whip, she galloped over the road like the wind.

Ten miles to the Dove-cote! It was a long ride all alone in the night, and a dreary one too, being over a lonely road.

But she knew every step of the way well, and she never stopped to consider the distance, for a matter of more vital consequence depended upon the issue of her journey.

Three miles of the way had been accomplished, when Pearle thought she heard the gallop of another horse behind her. Her heart almost ceased its beating as she sur-

mised *who* it might be that was traveling the same road with herself at that time of the night,

She drew her rein and guided her horse beneath the thick shadow of some overhanging trees, and waited.

Horse and rider were both absolutely motionless, while that other equestrian came bounding rapidly on, passed the spot, and then was gone.

Pearle had strained her eyes to catch a glance of that flying steed and its rider. The night was not so very dark, although the moon had not yet risen, and she easily distinguished the manly form—familiar as the day to her—seated on the proud bay horse, which had so many, many times trotted by her side.

It was even as she had thought—Richard Byrnholm, on his handsome bay horse, Major.

With a moan of pain, Pearle turned her horse again into the road, to follow him at a slower pace. Her heart was well-nigh breaking, for it told her that he was going to Ariel, as she had bidden him in that little note, which, even now, was lying crumpled and crushed in the pocket of her riding habit.

Yet she did not feel quite so lonely as she had done before he passed; there was a certain sense of protection in knowing that, in case of danger, she could fly to his side and be safe, though it would have been a desperate need that would have made her do that, believing what she did.

As closely as she dared, she followed that rapidly receding figure, and finally turned from the little lane leading from the main road.

Ten minutes later, Richard Byrnholm alighted before the little cottage she knew so well, and which was almost covered with ivy and woodbine.

A light gleamed from one of the windows which faced the lane, and seemed almost as if it had been set there as a beacon to guide some one expected.

Pearle drew her rein at some distance from the place, but yet where she could see plainly, and then sat still and watched.

She saw Richard fasten his horse to a hitching-post outside the gate, then spring with light footsteps up the path leading to the cottage, and rap upon the door. It was opened almost instantly, a few low, eager words of greeting were spoken by some one, then he disappeared, and the door was shut.

Quick as a flash Pearle sprang from her horse, and leading him among some bushes by the road-side, securely fastened him there.

"Keep quiet, my good Prince ; do not betray your mistress," she said, patting him gently on the neck ; then she too sped toward the vine-clad nest.

Without stopping to consider the very questionable errand upon which she had come, she directed her steps toward the window through which the light still shone. The curtain was only partially drawn, as one half of the blind was closed, and she could distinctly see all that the room contained.

It proved to be a bedroom, and daintily furnished in blue and white—colors so befitting a blonde, Pearle thought, with a curl of her proud lip. A pretty set of black French walnut made the room attractive and home-like, while the dainty toilet appurtenance upon the low dressing-case and commode were as rich and elegant as her own at home. Upon the bed, softly shaded by rich lace curtains, there lay a lovely child asleep—a fair, rosy cherub

he was, with dimples in his plump little hands, and grace and beauty in every outline.

Pearle nearly cried aloud as she looked upon this sleeping innocent. Unmistakably she could trace familiar lineaments there.

In the room beyond she could hear voices—the deep, full tones of a man's, and the softer, sweeter sound of a woman's—but she could catch no word that was uttered, neither could she see Richard Byrnholm's companion, though she would have given much to do so.

For fifteen or twenty minutes she stood there watching that sleeping boy and listening to those voices within, her face like that of a dead person, her hands clutching almost frantically at the window-sill.

At last—and it seemed as if the sight must smite her with blindness—Richard Byrnholm came into the room where the unconscious sleeper lay. He went softly to the bedside, a fond smile on his handsome lips, a tender light in his dark eyes. He put back the lace curtain and toyed a moment with the moist, clustering hair upon the fair brow, raised one of the dimpled hands in his own, and then, bending down, lightly kissed the rosy cheek, smoothed the bed-clothes over the graceful form, turned the light down to a pleasant dimness, and then went out as softly as he had come.

Was he thus bidding a fond good-by to his boy? Had he stolen hither to take a tender farewell of his hidden treasures, before departing with his bride on the morrow? And did Ariel know of his contemplated marriage? If so, how must she feel? and would she presume—would she *dare* to still claim the love and care that had, to all appearances, been hers heretofore?

These thoughts were maddening to Pearle. It seemed

as if molten lead was surging through every vein ; and outraged affection, anger, and jealousy for the time rendered her nearly insane.

“Does he think to deceive me thus?” she breathed, through her tightly closed teeth. “Does he think that I, a *Radcliffe*, will bear it—that I will tamely submit to share his love in any such manner? No ; nothing would be too bad for him, and I am ready for anything. His own life shall be blighted on the morrow, even as he has dared to blight mine and insult me, by giving me the *second* place in his heart.”

Again she bent her head to listen. She stood on tiptoe and laid her cheek against the window-pane, but she could catch no word, only the sound of subdued voices in earnest conversation ; and it seemed as if she must scream aloud in her agony, and beat upon that window until she had dashed it into atoms.

At last the interview seemed to be ended, for Richard opened the door and came out upon the little porch.

“Take good care of yourself, Ariel,” he said, in his rich, deep tones ; “and be sure nothing happens to Richie—he is a treasure of whom any father might be proud.”

A deep sigh tingled upon Pearle’s already burning ears.

“I shall miss you, Richard,” returned a sweet voice that was full of tears.

“I know you will, Ariel,” was the low, sympathetic reply. “Your life must be very lonely, and it is hard that it should be so ; but do not lose your courage. I shall be back again as soon as possible, and I hope that you will be happy again by and by. Do not spare for anything that you want or need, for I have made a deposit for you in your own name in the county bank ; and if anything happens to you or the little one, telegraph me at once—I

will keep you posted regarding my movements. Now, God bless you, dear child, and good-by."

There was a moment of silence, as of a strong and lingering hand-clasp, and that pale, passion-torn girl outside bent breathlessly forward to note what followed.

She could just distinguish the outline of two figures within the shadow of the vines, and as she looked, Richard Byrnholm bent forward and touched his lips tenderly to his companion's forehead; then, without another word, turned and walked rapidly down the little path, while the door of the cottage was closed and locked.

Pearle crouched close among the heavy vines, until her faithless lover—as now she fully believed him to be—had mounted and rode away; then she sank prone upon the wet turf, while her body writhed and was distorted by the fierce agony which she suffered, and dare not give expression to, lest she should disturb the inmates of the cottage.

It was a sight to make the heavens weep in sympathy with; but the mute stars alone were witnesses of her grief, and only the dew-laden vines above dropped their silent tears upon the crushed and heart-broken girl.

But it would not do for her to linger longer there, and she soon staggered to her feet and dragged her weary steps to where she had fastened her horse, climbed into the saddle, and then sped away like the wind toward home.

She never could recall afterward much regarding that ride. Her faithful horse must have borne her safely back to Ashton Manor without any guidance from her hand, for she was benumbed and deadened to all outward objects, and it was a matter of wonder, when she came to think of it, how she had even managed to keep her seat.

That scene she had just witnessed, those words she had heard, the consciousness that all of which Adison Cheet-

ham had accused her lover was indeed true, burned into Pearle Radcliffe's brain with a pain so horrible that it was a marvel she did not go mad.

Again, in imagination, she saw Richard Byrnholm—*her* lover, *her* almost husband—bending tenderly over Ariel's child, kissing him fondly, and toying with his raven locks. Again she heard him say, "God bless you, dear child, and good-by."

She could almost feel that mute hand-clasp, and see the tenderness that beamed from eye to eye as he took such fond farewell of that beautiful woman, whom, doubtless, he had loved for years.

"I will not bear it!" she cried, fiercely, slapping the reins sharply upon the neck of the already flying beast. "I will not be so cheated for nothing. To be drawn almost to the altar, and then to discover that I have been made such a dupe—a plaything—a stepping-stone to a fortune, perhaps to support *them*! I can never endure it! The guests are here! To-morrow the church will be crowded with the interested and curious to see the grand wedding. Heavens! I can never go to the altar with *him* now. Can I with that *other*?"

She shuddered, she reeled, and nearly fell from her saddle at the thought. But if she did not, there would be no wedding; Richard would be arrested, and all this disgraceful thing would have to be explained.

"Oh, Richard! Richard!" she moaned; "you have broken my heart, you have ruined my life, and still I love you—love you with a deathless love. I *cannot* see you disgraced. It would kill me outright to know you were behind prison bars, and to hear your fair name bandied from mouth to mouth in scorn and contempt. Can I save you—*dare* I save you—in *that* way?"

And all the rest of the way home her white lips kept muttering, "Can I? can I?" until finally some mocking sprite seemed to catch the words up, and, reversing them, shouted in her ears, "I can! I can!"

She had barely strength enough left when she at last reached Ashton Manor to fasten her horse in his stall, sweep out of sight the straw she had strewn over the floor for him to walk on, and then steal noiselessly back to her own room.

The house was not yet closed for the night; the guests were still below, having a merry time, and her absence had not been discovered.

Wearied out with her long ride, weak and faint with suffering and excitement, she crept into her bed, where, all night long, those words, like jingling bells, seemed sounding in her brain, "Can I? can I?—I can! I can!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE WEDDING-DAY.

Pearle Radcliffe's wedding-day broke as perfect and cloudless as the previous morning had been. The birds sang as gayly, the air was as fresh and sweet, the whole earth bloomed and glowed with as rich a beauty, and "God smiled everywhere." But for the pale, hollow-eyed bride, lying in her darkened chamber, all the beauty in the world was dead; she never hoped to take pleasure in aught that was fair or lovely again.

Who can describe what the night had been to her? Step

by step she had gone over every event that had occurred during the past four weeks.

She remembered how, at the very first, she had felt a secret aversion toward Adison Cheetham—how ominous his name had sounded in her ears—how repulsive his face, with its reddish-brown eyes and sinister smile, had been to her.

She recalled how his glance had appeared to follow her wherever she went, from the first moment of his introduction to her, and how, little by little, he had grown more familiar with her, until that day of the excursion he had dared to insult her by proclaiming his love for her.

She believed him to be a selfish, vindictive man, with neither principle nor honor. She knew that he meant to ruin Richard, and she knew that he meant to accomplish that end by compelling *her* to become his wife.

How cunningly he had contrived it all, by placing Richard's fate in her hands! If she did not accede to his terms, Richard would be ruined and disgraced irrevocably; his fair fame and name would be tarnished in the sight of the world, and nothing could ever restore it to honor and respect.

On the other hand, she could save him from this if she would. She could preserve his name and honor before the world. No one need ever know but he and his foe, Ariel and herself, of what he was guilty. But how fearful the sacrifice! What a cursed future there would be for her, not to mention the scandal that would be created by an act for which she alone would be blamed! Could she bear it—could she do it?

It mattered little what became of her now, she thought; her heart was broken, and the sooner her life's drama was played out and ended, the better it would be.

But the idea of yielding to such a villain—to acknowledge his power over her, and humble herself beneath it! This was the hardest part of the battle to her, and the most humiliating to her pride.

She read Adison Cheetham like an open book. She knew that he was desirous of marrying—he wanted both a rich and beautiful wife to preside in his home, accompany him upon excursions of pleasure, and to present to his friends.

Pearle was both rich and beautiful; she was all that the most exacting could desire in a wife, and he had determined that he would win her—if not by fair means, then by foul. It mattered little whether she loved him or not, so that his ambition and selfish desires were satisfied.

She realized how cunningly he must have set himself to work to ferret out the secrets of Richard Byrnholm—how he must have abused his confidence and pryed into his private affairs to get possession of those checks and the memorandum book by which he had proved to her his infamy and wickedness.

Yes, *proved*; for since her visit to the Dove-cote, she was indeed satisfied that she had “loved not wisely, but too well.”

It would not have been so hard to have had him die with some fell disease and buried from her sight forever, as it was to thus sit down and deliberately try to slay the love and honor that she had always had for him, and that had become, as it were, a part of her own life.

But it must be done—at least she must cast him from her as one utterly unworthy, and it did not matter much what became of her afterward. She could never be his wife now. The vision of that beautiful sleeping child, the sound of that woman’s low, sweet tones, would forever

haunt her if she did, and become a grim specter from which she could never escape. But——

It was a fearful alternative, but she strove to consider it with calmness and fortitude.

She could at least save him from a felon's doom, from disgrace, and a name forever blighted; she could, like some heathen wife, build the funeral pyre for her dead love, and then sacrifice herself upon it; and perhaps some time Richard might repent, and right the wrong he had done Ariel and her child.

Yes; ere the morning broke she had decided to accede to Adison Cheetham's fiendish proposal. "But," she had added, to herself, "let him beware for having driven me to any such desperate measure."

When Elizabeth, her maid, came to awake her in the morning, she started back, with an exclamation of terror, at the change that had taken place during the night in her fair young mistress.

"What is it, Miss Pearle? What has happened?" she asked, anxiously scanning the sunken, lusterless eyes, the hueless cheek, and marble lips.

"I have not slept," Pearle said, briefly, yet shuddering at the memory of all she had suffered.

"I should think not, indeed. You are ill—wretchedly ill; there can be no wedding to-day," the girl cried, nervously.

"Oh, yes; you need not fear for a disappointment like that; I will not cheat the world of their wedding," Pearle said, with a harsh, bitter laugh, that frightened the girl still more.

"I shall go and call my lady; you need a physician," she returned, moving toward the door, and beginning to think that Pearle was delirious.

"Stop, Elizabeth! you will do no such thing," Miss Radcliffe answered, authoritatively, and realizing the necessity of controlling herself. "You will say nothing to any one regarding my appearance this morning. You will simply give orders that I am not to be disturbed until the hour arrives for us to go to the church. Do you understand?"

"Yes, 'm; but—but——"

"Say no more about the matter, then, if you please. Go and bring me the strongest cup of coffee you can get the cook to make."

Pearle waved her hand with an air of stern command, and her voice was sharp and peremptory.

The girl retired at her bidding, astonished and deeply hurt by her mistress' words and manner. Pearle had never spoken to her in such a way before, in all the years during which she had so faithfully served her.

Poor Pearle, too, lost all self-control as soon as she was left alone again. The sight of Elizabeth's affectionate, pitying face unnerved her, and she fell to nervous sobbing and moaning. But it was only for a moment or two, for when the girl returned she was outwardly calm again, and drank the coffee she brought without a word. She turned away with loathing, however, from the tray of dainty food which the faithful girl had prepared for her.

"I cannot eat," she said.

"What *shall* I do for you?" the maid asked, almost weeping. "You don't look like a happy bride, Miss Pearle; you should be blithe as a lark, and you look more fit for your coffin."

"I *am* more fit to be laid in my coffin—my heart is broken!" Pearle cried, wildly, wringing her hands until their joints snapped.

"Kind Heaven, hear her!—and on her wedding-day, too!" gasped the girl, amazed.

Knock after knock came upon the chamber door, and the sweet voices of the bride-maids begged to come in and wish the fair bride-elect "joy," that the day was so propitious; but to all she turned a deaf ear; she would not permit one to enter, not even the gentle Alice Arnaut, who went away grieved and troubled on account of it.

To her brother's wife she excused herself by saying she wished no one around her save Elizabeth, who could do everything, and she wished to be quiet as long as possible.

Thus she secured solitude for herself, and sat like a block of marble while Elizabeth, almost as white as her mistress, arrayed her for the altar.

The wedding party were to assemble in the library at half-past ten; the carriages were to leave for the church fifteen minutes later, and Captain Byrnholm was to meet them there.

At twenty minutes of eleven the bride-maids, with their attendants, had all gathered in the library; and a fairer group had never graced a wedding than those fair girls who were to accompany lovely Pearle Radcliffe to the altar. There were twelve in all, and each was dressed most tastefully and becomingly.

Fair Alice Arnaut, Pearle's most valued friend, and first bride-maid, was dressed in silken gauze over heavy white silk, and which was looped with clusters of rich, velvety, golden-lipped pansies, while in one white-gloved hand she carried a lovely basket filled with the same flowers.

"Pansies that a little sunbeam bold,
Kissed on their lips their tints of gold."

She was the sweetest of them all, fair though they were, and fittest to stand beside the lovely bride.

The hour hand on the golden clock pointed to fifteen minutes of eleven, and all began to be anxious for the appearance of Pearle.

She came at last, leaning upon the arm of her brother, the Earl of Derwentwater, who had gone to her chamber to bring her down; but every smile vanished, every lip was mute as she entered the room, for something terribly ominous in that waxen face forbade even the form of congratulation or a murmur of admiration.

The stony eyes were fixed on vacancy, appearing to see no one. She greeted no one, but stood like some figure carved in marble; while the earl, himself apparently much disconcerted, hurried their guests to their several carriages.

She looked like a bride of snow, for there was not an atom of color about her to relieve the dead white of her attire. The long heavy Lyons satin was a marvel of richness and elegance; the veil, wrought by hand, and made to order in Brussels, was the rarest thing of the kind that had ever been seen in all the county of Leicestershire. Her beautiful arms were like polished ivory, and just shaded by the rare Spanish lace sleeves that hung loose and flowing from the shoulder.

Not a single flower graced her person, although Captain Byrnholm for the last month had been forcing his orange trees for this very purpose, and only that morning had sent over a large basketful of choice, fragrant blossoms. When Elizabeth would have twined them amid the masses of her chestnut hair, shudder after shudder shook her, and she cried aloud with pain, beating them away with her hands.

“Take them from my sight—I cannot wear them!” she had said, with a look that frightened the girl.

Then, with her own hands, she had bound a coronet of gleaming pearls about her head.

Every one in the library had noticed this change, and wondered what had become of the bridegroom's beautiful donation; but with that stony face and those hopeless eyes before them, no one dared to breathe a word of inquiry.

What had happened? Could the lovers have quarreled at the last moment? Was that the reason why Pearle had excused herself from the company and kept her room last night? Was that why she would not wear his flowers?

Something like this the bride-maids asked each other on their way to the church, their bright faces clouded, and an ominous chill settling down upon their hearts, and robbing the fair morning of its glory.

"I told them not to be too sure," muttered Charlotte Breton, with a wise shake of her head. "They invoked the witches, and a 'spell' has been cast upon this wedding, or I'll lose my guess."

Arrived at the church, the party alighted and entered the vestibule, where Richard Byrnholm and Adison Cheetham awaited them, the latter with a face nearly as white as Pearle's own.

Richard started forward and uttered a cry of dismay as Pearle entered, leaning on the arm of her brother.

He met her just as she crossed the threshold. He held out both hands to her, a look of keenest anxiety on his handsome face.

Was this the fair, fond bride he had expected to meet—this creature of stone, this vision of ice and snow?

She shrank from him with a gesture of loathing that seemed to cut his very heart-strings asunder, and which made her brother and every one present stare at her in undisguised wonder.

All save Adison Cheetham, whose face lighted as if by

magic as he noticed it, and with a swift, light step he advanced and stood by her side.

Richard frowned at this presumptuous act, but more intent upon his betrothed's appearance than anything else, he bent near her and whispered :

"Pearle—Margaret! are you ill? Why do you look at me thus?"

She dropped the earl's arm and moved farther away from him, an icy shiver shaking her from head to foot.

"What is it—what troubles her?" Richard asked, turning to her brother.

"I do not know; she will not answer a single question. I found her like this when I went to bring her to the carriage. Not a word can I draw from her lips," he answered, gloomily.

Adison Cheetham reached down and took one of Pearle's gloved hands in his; then turning to Richard, he said, in a cold, hard tone :

"Captain Byrnholm, Miss Radcliffe desires to be released, here and now, from her engagement to you."

Richard Byrnholm's face paled to the hue of death at these startling words; then, turning upon him haughtily, he said :

"What idle jesting is this? It ill befits any one upon such an occasion."

"It is not idle jesting, as you will find. Ask for yourself," was the calm reply.

The whole party were stricken dumb for the moment. The earl looked as if he could strike the man senseless at his feet, if he had had the power to move.

Richard gazed in speechless astonishment from one to another, as if demanding some explanation of the strange, the horrible words he had heard. He knew that some-

thing was wrong with Pearle, or she would never have met him thus.

What could it all mean—those stony, vacant eyes, the colorless face, the drawn and compressed lips, that erect, repelling attitude? This was not the sweet, bright face he had kissed but yesterday. Surely those were not the same lips that had so passionately told him then that she loved him.

But—great Heaven! All at once he recalled her nervousness and pallor, her eager desire to tell him something. He remembered the horror in her eyes and her white face when he had found her in the rustic arbor, and how she had evaded his question when he had asked if anything had disturbed her faith in him. Had *that* foreshadowed *this*? Why—oh! why had he not waited and heard her confession then? Why had he not sent Adison Cheetham away and listened to her, as she had begged him to do?

What did *he* mean now by asking him to release Pearle? Had *he* won her away from him? It looked like it, with him standing so confidently by her side, holding her white gloved hand; while there was a strange gleam in his eyes, and a smile about his lips, that he had never seen there before. It was so evil, so triumphantly sinister, that it made him shiver.

But it could not be true—it must be all a farce, although rather an untimely one; for had not Pearle, only yesterday, called Adison “that hateful man.” But—he scanned her face again eagerly—she might have been deceiving him—she might have been acting a part!

The Earl of Derwentwater strode forward and seized the fair girl by the arm, his brow black with wrath, his eyes flashing angrily. He was about to address her, when Richard interrupted him.

"Pearle, what fearful thing is this?" he demanded, in shaking tones, of the motionless bride.

But he might as well have spoken to a block of stone. Her eyes were still looking vacantly before her, and she did not even appear to hear him.

"Margaret, speak!" commanded the earl, in low, repressed tones.

"Tell me, Pearle, is it true, as he says, that you wish to be released from your troth to me, here and now?"

She shuddered at his words, but bowed her head in prompt assent.

"My God!" and Richard Byrnholm staggered back as if he had been struck a heavy blow.

"Are you mad, Margaret Radcliffe?" cried her brother, terribly excited, while dire confusion prevailed among the bridal party.

"What does this mean?" the earl haughtily demanded, turning to Adison Cheetham.

"It means, my lord, that Miss Radcliffe has changed her mind, and intends to marry me instead of Captain Byrnholm," he returned, with insolent assurance.

"'Tis false! I will not believe it!" hoarsely whispered Richard, great drops of agony breaking out upon his forehead.

Then again he appealed to the stony-eyed bride.

"Pearle, tell me, as you value your future, have I been deceived, duped? Did you come hither this morning to wed *him* instead of me?"

Again she bowed, but no words issued from her drawn lips.

"Do you *wish* it? Do you *love* him? Have you ceased to love *me*? Was it this you wished to tell me yesterday?" he demanded, breathlessly.

The white lids quivered above those vacant eyes, a spasm of pain contracted her whole face, and he could hear her white teeth grate one upon another, as she once more inclined her proud head in token of assent.

The earl was in despair, the bride-maids grew weak and faint, while Richard Byrnholm could not have looked worse had he been dead.

"There is some mystery here. Are you a traitor? Explain the meaning of this strange scene," he demanded, turning upon his whilom friend with a glance that made him cower in spite of his assumed assurance.

"I can only explain it by telling you again that Miss Radcliffe will become my wife immediately upon your releasing her from her promise to you."

"Do you mean to say that you are going on with this wedding in *that* way, Pearle?" demanded her brother, in a towering passion.

"Yes." Her lips framed the word, but no sound came from them.

"I forbid it," the earl said, sternly.

"You cannot forbid it. Miss Radcliffe has a right to choose for herself; and I pray you will not detain us longer, since the rector is doubtless awaiting us now," returned Adison Cheetham, defiantly.

"I can only release her from her engagement to me at her own request," Richard said, pressing his hand hard against his throbbing temples. He could not believe it even now.

"She does so request," returned his enemy.

"Do you, Pearle? Have I lost you? Do you mean to marry him?"

"Yes," she answered, this time in a tone that all could hear.

He groaned aloud. It seemed as if some sudden shock had rent his soul from his body; then, all his outraged manhood rising within him, he cried out:

"You are released—go! Go, both of you, wile cheats that you are."

Turning away with a gesture of despair, he staggered toward the door, but his strength failing him, he dropped into a chair that stood near.

The Earl of Derwentwater turned again to Pearle, and demanded:

"Margaret Radcliffe, do you mean to be guilty of such a dastardly act? Will you desert a good and faithful man at the very altar rail for one who has proved himself a scoundrel and a villain, or this would never have occurred? Tell me, are you bent upon marrying this man?"

"Yes," she again replied, without moving a muscle of her face.

"I will not allow it—I will forbid the banns," he said.

"It can do no good; it is too late to talk of anything like that. She has given me her word, the special license is in my pocket at this moment, and no one has any right to interfere when, of her own will, she goes with me to the altar," returned Adison Cheetham, speaking with a great deal more calmness than he felt, while not for a moment had he released his hold upon Pearle's hand, to which every now and then he gave a warning pressure.

"I cannot understand it. What shall I do with her?" cried the earl, turning in despair toward the others of the amazed party. "Don't do it, Pearle, I beg—I plead with you," he cried again to her.

"*I must*," she answered; then, with a low moan, she pointed toward Richard, crying: "Go to him—save him!"

Every eye was turned in that direction, and the earl

sprang forward just in season to save the stricken man from falling to the floor. The blow had been too heavy, and he was borne senseless from the place.

Pearle wrenched her hand from Adison Cheetham and would also have flown to him, but he seized it again, placed it firmly within his arm, where he held it as if in a vise; then motioning to the ushers, the church doors were swung open, and he half dragged his unwilling bride within, and, with a look of stern resolve upon his face, led her directly to the altar.

We have already described that startling scene—the dismay of the many witnesses at the change of bridegrooms, the hesitation and anxiety of the good old rector, the ghastly appearance of the bride, and her stony silence throughout the ceremony.

It was soon over, however, and Adison Cheetham led the party to the vestry, where the church register lay open for the recording of their names.

He wrote his name boldly, with a triumphant smile on his evil lips, and then turning, held out the pen to Pearle.

“Give me those papers,” she commanded, with glittering eyes, and without noticing the pen.

He took them from his pocket, a strange expression on his face, and gave them to her.

She seized them as a miser would grip his recovered treasure; her hand closed over them with a grip that rent her glove in every finger.

“Now write your name, if you please, Mrs. Cheetham,” said her husband, again offering her the pen.

She shivered at the sound of the hated name.

“I cannot,” she said, through her tightly shut teeth.

He lifted her right hand; it was clenched as if in a convulsion. He tried to relax it, but could not.

"You must sign the church register," he said, sternly.

Her eyes met his with glittering defiance; she tossed her head, and laughed a little mad, blood-curdling laugh; then turning quickly, she walked from the place before any one could prevent her.

By no word or look had she assented to the sacrilege that had just been perpetrated, and she would have been torn to atoms before she would have written her name as his wife upon that record.

She had the papers—she had saved her lover from the doom which threatened him; and now let the man who had wrought all this ruin and misery beware how he tempted her further.

With swift steps and haughty bearing she swept to the carriage, which she entered unassisted, and, followed by the not too happy groom, was driven back to Ashton Manor.

CHAPTER XII.

VILLAINY UNVAILED.

Not one word did Pearle speak during that homeward drive. She sat erect in the carriage, looking straight before her, her eyes void of expression but painfully bright, and, save for the dilating of her delicate nostrils, seeming utterly destitute of life.

When the carriage drew up beneath the porch at Ashton Manor, Adison Cheetham sprang to the ground and turned to assist her to alight.

She repulsed him with both hands, and stepping to the

earth without help, walked directly to the drawing-room, where she found her brother and his wife sitting with Richard Byrnholm, and all looking as if they had just returned from the grave of some dear lost one.

No one save her husband presumed to follow her. The bride-maids and their attendants, gathering in little knots and groups in the halls, talked the matter over in whispers, and with white, wondering faces.

Without looking to the right or left, Pearle went directly to the sofa where Richard Byrnholm lay, having just recovered from the fit in which he had fallen. She did not falter in a single step; she seemed like some moving iceberg, so coldly white and stately she moved. She still held the checks in her tightly shut hand, and before Adison Cheetham dreamed of her purpose, she had given them to Richard Byrnholm.

He was dumfounded at the act. He did not suppose, in her wounded pride and love, she would stoop to confess the reasons for the step she had taken. He had reckoned upon that pride and wounded love refusing all explanation of her act.

He sprang forward to intercept her as soon as he comprehended her intention, a half-suppressed exclamation of anger escaping him, for too well he knew what would follow.

But Pearle turned and faced him with a look that made him shrink involuntarily before her.

"Back!" she cried. "You have had *your* hour—*mine* has come now."

Then addressing Richard again, in tones that smote him like a dying wail, so hopeless, so sad were they, she said:

"Richard, what I have done to-day was done to pur-

chase your safety from a bad man's power. I could never have been your wife after what I have recently learned regarding you, and I would rather have died than been obliged to go to the altar with yonder wretch to-day! But there was no alternative—disgrace and ruin for you was worse for me to contemplate than any amount of suffering and sacrifice on my own account, and so I resolved to save you."

Richard Byrnholm lifted his ashen face and gazed at her as if he thought she had lost her reason, and a groan escaped him, while those forged checks remained unheeded in his grasp. He could not comprehend one word she had spoken.

"What do you mean, Margaret?" demanded the earl, sternly. "No one understands the meaning of the mad act of which you have been guilty to-day, and all this talk about ruin, disgrace, and sacrifice is inexplicable."

Pearle put her hand wearily to her head. She took off the gleaming tiara of pearls, as if their weight oppressed her. She impatiently tore the misty veil from her brow, and threw it upon the floor. Then, still speaking to Richard, in a mournful voice, she continued:

"I do not know why you should have sought to wrong me in the way you had—why you should have won my love when you had none to give me in return; but, aside from all that, I cannot understand why you should have been guilty of such a crime, or run such a fearful risk, when you might have known that whatever *I* had of this world's wealth would gladly have been shared with you, to have saved you from any embarrassment. If you needed money, why did you not ask your best friends for it?"

"I do not know what you mean, Pearle. I do not know what you are talking about," Richard cried, sitting

erect, and regarding her with a face that was a perfect blank.

She returned his look with one of flashing scorn and contempt. She believed he was acting a part.

"Read!" she commanded, pointing to the unheeded checks he still held in his hand.

With an anxious, puzzled expression he unfolded them, and his face grew still more surprised.

"How came you by these? What can they have to do with the terrible events of to-day?" he asked.

"If I had not redeemed them for you, you would now have been on your way to a felon's cell," she said.

"Her brain is turned," Richard said, in a frightened tone, to the earl; then his eyes fell again upon the checks in his hand. "These checks, one for eight, the other for—hold!" he cried, starting back; "they read for eighty and two hundred pounds! I have received none for any such amounts. Ha! they have been tampered with—they are forged checks. Pearle, solve this enigma if you can;" and he advanced to the fair girl's side, glancing first at her and then again upon those papers.

Governed by some impulse, he suddenly turned them over, and read his own name indorsed on the back, and his face instantly grew awful in its sternness.

"Who gave you these?" he demanded of Pearle.

She pointed toward Adison Cheetham.

Richard strode across the room and stood before him.

"Explain this terrible thing. *How* have you accomplished this deed, which, from this day forth, must make us bitterest enemies instead of friends?" he asked, through his shut teeth.

He was beginning to comprehend the sickening mystery.

A smile so evil and baleful overspread the man's face, that Richard involuntarily recoiled from him.

"I told you once, you remember, that, *some time*, I would be *even* with you. You triumphed over me in the past; now the tables are turned—we *are* even," he hissed, revengefully.

"Even—heavens!" Richard Byrnholm cried, in horror, and then stood spell-bound, gazing upon the friend who had so suddenly changed into a fiend.

In an instant he saw it all—how his trust had been betrayed; how he had been duped, and his life and Pearl's ruined; how the revenge of years had been gathering force to strike the blow which should crush him to the earth.

Even! For a petty disappointment of his youth, for an imaginary wrong, he had dared to plot and carry out this fearful thing, and then call it "even!"

The insolence, the maliciousness of this speech maddened him. He lifted his powerful arm as if to strike a fearful blow, and every one in the room believed he meant to fell the man dead at his feet.

But only for a moment did he stand thus. Slowly his arm dropped again at his side, while the expression of almost frantic fury on his face gave place to one of scorn and loathing, mingled with something of pity.

"I cannot strike in anger the man who, for years, I have believed to be my truest friend," he said, sadly. "I cannot avenge myself upon one who has eaten at my table as an honored guest, even though he turns now and stings the hand that has fed him."

He went again and stood before Pearl. He staggered as he drew near her, and groaned aloud as he looked into her colorless face.

"Pearle, did he make you believe that I had committed this gross forgery?" he asked.

She bowed assent. She would have shrieked aloud had she opened her lips. She began to fear that she had sacrificed herself unnecessarily. Surely every look, every act of Richard's bespoke him an innocent man.

But, ah! there was Ariel and her child. He might be innocent of the forgery, but she had seen him with her own eyes at that tiny cottage—she had seen him kiss the bright boy—she had heard him breathe fond words into the lovely woman's ears.

"Pearle," he said again, "your sacrifice has been in vain; you have saved me from *nothing*, as I will prove to you. That revengeful wretch yonder has never forgiven me for an unintentional injury I once did him, though I never dreamed of the fact until this moment. He has been plotting direst vengeance upon me, even though he did not hesitate to live upon my purse when his own means failed him, and he knew not which way to turn for aid. Yes—I never would have lisped it under any other circumstances—I have paid many a bill for him; I nursed him through a long sickness at school, and then canceled his debt to his physician; I bought him luxuries when he had no money to purchase them for himself; I watched and tended, trusted and loved him as I would have done an only brother, believing him to be all that he professed—my faithful friend. Our only trouble—a trivial misunderstanding I believed it to be—was regarding that race for the prize, of which I have before told you. He was fearfully angry at the time I won it, and I know it must have been a disappointment, especially as he also lost his degree; but I never dreamed that those words of his, telling me he would 'yet be even with me,' were anything more

than jest. But it seems that he has been nursing his wrath during all these years. He has abused my hospitality and betrayed my trust by doing me the foulest wrong the human heart was ever capable of. Oh! Pearle, Pearle! how *could* you let him deceive you so? Why *did* you not come to me and tell me all before he had ruined our lives?" he cried, reaching out his clasped hands imploringly to her.

"I was ready to tell you yesterday, but you would not listen," she said, coldly. She was still thinking of Ariel and her boy.

"I know—I remember," he groaned. "Oh! forgive me, for I might have saved you. Oh! how *could* you believe I would be guilty of such a crime? And yet you *must* have believed it. And how you must have suffered, poor child!" he went on, pityingly. "The struggle must have been terrible, for you thought I needed to be saved, and the alternative was fearful. But, Pearle—my own love, my lost darling—instead of saving me, you have doomed us both to a life of misery. These checks are forgeries, but not of my making—they are *his*!"

"*Richard!*" shrieked the wretched girl, in a voice of despair.

"No; they are not mine. Even this writing on the back is not mine, although almost any one would swear it was—at least, any one who was familiar with my hand. I received, a few weeks ago, these two checks, one for ten pounds, the other for eight—little bills that had been owing me for some time by parties who live at a distance. Not having occasion to use them, I laid them aside in a private drawer of my desk, and without indorsing them, as I never do that until I am ready to cash a check. Adison Cheetham, my *trusted friend and confidante*, must have

taken them from that drawer. *He alone* has tampered with them, changing the amount, and writing my name upon the back. *He* is the forger, not I," Richard concluded, in a voice of thunder, and pointing toward the moody wretch.

"Prove it!" Cheetham cried, with a sneer, and stung to the quick by the scorn in his tone. "Any judge, any jury would pronounce you guilty and condemn you on the evidence of those checks alone. Let those bits of paper be brought before a court of justice, and see whether you would go scot-free or not."

"I do not intend they shall ever be seen by any other eye," Richard calmly replied, and deliberately tearing them in pieces; "but I *can* prove my position, nevertheless. I can prove, Pearle, this man's ability to forge any person's name and handwriting. I have in my possession now an old writing-book with which I used to amuse myself while at school by drawing the faces of my classmates and sometimes caricaturing them. I one day showed these drawings to Adison, and he declared that if I could catch expressions so cleverly, he could at least imitate the writing of every student in the class. To test his ability, I got the boys to write their names underneath the faces I had drawn, and then carrying the book back to Adison, he copied them so exactly that they were almost ready to swear that they had written them twice over themselves. This was done, too, in the presence of several of the class, who were as eager as I to see if he could do as he claimed."

"You have only your own word to prove all this," Adison Cheetham retorted, hotly.

He had grown very much flushed during Richard's statement, and a nervous twitching was visible at the corners

of his mouth. He began to fear that he had overreached himself after all his trouble, for he had entirely forgotten that little episode of his school life until it was recalled by Richard's recital.

"Our class numbered fifteen, Pearle," Richard continued, still addressing her; "five of them live in London now, and the oath of these five would be sufficient to establish the truth of what I have said."

"I think we have listened long enough to this kind of talk, Mrs. Cheetham. If you will prepare for your journey we will take our departure," Adison Cheetham said, coming near to where Pearle stood.

She shuddered as he uttered the hateful name; but without paying the slightest heed to his words, she bent toward Richard, her eyes fairly burning him with their intensity.

"And that little book that you missed and found yesterday when we were at Linden Grange—tell me about that. Is that a forgery, too? And Ariel and Richie—tell me, tell me quickly," she breathed, trembling with nervous excitement.

Richard Byrnholm started violently, and a deep flush instantly suffused his handsome face at these wild words.

"What do *you* know about that little book, Pearle—what do you know about those of whom you speak?" he asked, speaking with an evident constraint, which seemed to her like guilt.

"I know *all* about them!" she exclaimed, passionately. "I know that, in some way, they belong to you. I know that you care for them; that the expenses of their support is borne by you. That is in your own handwriting in that little book which you owned yesterday in my presence. I

had seen it before—I had read its contents; for *he* brought that also to me to prove your duplicity.”

Again Richard flushed, this time angrily.

“I was not aware until this hour that I had been entertaining a veritable Paul Pry for the last few weeks,” he said, with biting sarcasm; then he added, sadly: “I can begin to realize now what you have suffered, if, believing I was guilty of forgery, you also saw the contents of that little book. Those at least are *bona fide*; they are indeed all in my own handwriting, and the money was paid out for the purposes there designated; but——”

“And you own it—you own it to *me*!” Pearle cried, with flashing eyes. “You dared to deceive me thus! You thought to make me your wife, and continue to love and care for that black-eyed boy and his blue-eyed mother, and I would never know it. And I trusted you so,” she went on, with a sob; “I thought there was no one more worthy of confidence than you. Ah, me! who is there in this wide, wide world in whom one can have absolute faith?”

“Hush, Pearle!” Richard said, in a sharp, pained voice. Her evident suffering unmanned him, aside from his own despair. “Wait and hear me. But how came you to know anything about the personal appearance of Ariel and Richard?”

“I have seen them.”

“You!” he cried, astonished. “Oh! my love, my love! how long have you gone on suspecting this horrible thing of me, torturing yourself and learning to hate and despise me?” he concluded, with inexpressible sadness.

“No matter how long,” she answered, in a shaking voice. “You do not deny it—nay, you cannot deny it, for I have seen you there. I have seen you press your

lips upon the face of that child so like you in form and feature ; I have seen your lips touch *her* forehead also."

"Pearle! When?" he interrupted, startled beyond measure at her wild words.

"When? Do you ask me? Is your memory so treacherous?" she demanded, bitterly ; then, whispering hoarsely, and with dry, burning lips, she went on : "*Last night!* I followed you to the Dove-cote, and but for the scene which I witnessed there then—but for the words I heard you speak to *her*, I should never have had strength to do what I have done to-day. It aroused a slumbering demon in my bosom ; it made me mad and wild ; it told me that you had deceived me in the most cruel way a woman can be deceived ; it told me that you had only given me a paltry corner of your heart, if any at all, and I resolved then that I would save you from the consequences of your crimes, but I would make you suffer also, even as I suffered in having all this sin and wrong revealed to me."

"Richard, *what* is this half-crazed child talking about?" asked the Earl of Derwentwater, coming forward and passing his strong arm around his sister's waist.

She was quivering and shaking almost as if she had been in a convulsion, and he feared she would fall to the floor.

"I cannot explain this here, Allstone. It is a secret, and the secret is not mine. But I can see just how it has been used against me, and just how this dear girl has been deceived and bullied into the error she has committed to-day. It has ruined us both ; but I must not think of that now—I must at least vindicate myself to her. Pearle, come with me into yonder reception-room. Give me five minutes to speak to you alone in, and I will eradicate every foul suspicion from your mind."

Pearle moaned aloud at this. His words had the ring of truth in them.

"I am lost!" she cried, wringing her white-gloved hands in despair.

Adison Cheetham now advanced.

"I object to my wife's having any private conferences with Captain Byrnholm," he said, authoritatively.

Pearle grew calmer at this, and lifting her head defiantly, she said, icily :

"Do not presume to dictate in the slightest degree regarding my actions, either now or *hereafter*."

"The less conspicuous you make yourself in this house the better for you," thundered the earl, with lowering brow. Then turning again to his sister, he asked : "Will you hear what Richard has to say, Pearle?"

She nodded assent ; and, without a word, he led her to a reception-room at the end of the drawing-room, put her into a chair, and withdrew just outside the door as Richard entered.

The lovers, so cruelly and effectually separated, dare not look in each other's face ; they had all they could do to keep their rebellious, aching hearts under control.

Pearle sat with her head bowed upon her trembling hands, feeling as if all the world was slipping from her grasp, and wishing that she could sink into oblivion.

Richard advanced with staggering, uneven tread, and stood before her, his eyes bent upon the carpet, his arms tightly folded across his broad, heaving chest.

For full five minutes he talked to her in low, earnest, rapid tones, going over all his life since his acquaintance with her, reviewing his true and unalterable love for her, and referring, in a despairing way, to his hopes for the future. He talked until not a doubt of his integrity ex-

isted—until she hated herself for ever having allowed her faith in him to waver, and until she worshiped him anew as the noblest man that walked the earth.

“And now regarding Ariel and her child,” he said, in conclusion: “Since you know what you do about them, I must, in justice to myself, refer to their seeming connection with me, though her sad story is a secret, which, under the circumstances, must still remain such, as it is not mine to reveal. I had resolved to tell you all regarding them when you were my wife, for we should be one in heart and interest then, and I should not feel right to have any secrets from you. I cannot tell you now; but, Pearle, by all my love for you—and it is no light oath that I take—I swear that Ariel is nothing to me, beyond the friendly interest and sympathy I have for her present helpless condition, and the brotherly regard which her gentleness, goodness, patience in her trials, and her dependence upon me, could not fail to excite. True, I held her hand in mine for a moment last night—I touched my lips to her forehead; but it was a farewell that I might have taken of any friend. And Richie—though he is my namesake, as you have surmised, and I love him dearly, as we learn to love any one who depends upon our care—not one drop of *my* blood flows in his veins. Pearle, I have never deceived you in a single instance; you have become a part of myself, and my heart has ever been to you, so to speak, as open and frank as a printed page. I have been as true as truth itself to you; but more than this I cannot tell you now, for I have given my solemn pledge that I will keep this secret until the one whose it is can consistently recall it. Every word I have spoken is truth.”

“I believe you, and—I am lost!” she moaned again, when he finished. “Oh, Richard! Richard!” and the bit-

terness, the anguish of her tones pierced his heart like a poisoned arrow.

"Oh! *why* could you not have had faith in me?" he cried, passionately. "Why could you not have come to me and demanded an explanation? Why did you not at least give me a chance to vindicate myself?"

"Because *he* threatened to bring sure and sudden disgrace upon you if I attempted to do so before binding myself to him. His proofs appeared so incontestable that I *could* not doubt. I recognized the writing on the checks, and I knew the amounts they represented had been tampered with, and I could not live and see you a felon."

"Had you no suspicion of his base treachery?—did no such thought come to plead for me?" he asked, reproachfully.

"Yes, and I even accused him of it; but he appeared so confident. And then that little book—those items for Ariel and Richie; those household expenses; those debts of honor. How could I help suspecting and fearing the worst? Then he had told me he had seen her and the little one—he had followed you there several times. What happened yesterday, too, at the Grange, when you appeared so troubled at the loss of the book, and so relieved when you found it—that all went to prove it also. I found a note, too, in the book you brought me to read—a note from Ariel, begging you to come to her——"

"Pearle, my poor child, did you find that? Was that why you were so strange when I came back to you in the library?"

"Yes; everything seemed to point to your treachery; and then when I went to the Dove-cote myself, and saw—what I saw, I was crazed, and I did not care what became of me. Still, in the midst of all my misery, I loved you

well enough to wish to save you from the disgrace I knew must come upon you if all this was true; and so—oh! Richard, you know the rest.”

He groaned in bitterness of spirit; then all his strong nature rebelled against the author of their woe.

“I will kill him!” he said, fiercely. “Pearle, I shall kill that wretch who has thus ruined your life and robbed me of my dearest earthly treasure.”

There was a minute of dreadful silence; then Richard broke it again, saying eagerly, and as if a sudden idea had come to him:

“Pearle, such a marriage is worse than a mockery; it could not be considered legal; we can petition to have it annulled. Dear love, a forced marriage is no marriage. Your brother has influence; he will wish it, and you can but desire it. Pearle, you by right belong to me.”

“Oh! Richard,” she answered, with ashen lips, “it cannot be—you *know* it cannot be. Of my own free will, apparently, I went to the church, and in the presence of that throng virtually took upon myself the vows of a wife. No; I must bear the consequences of my sin, my doubt and suspicion, as best I can. Oh! why did I not brave all and tell you—why was I so blind, so willful, so idiotic?” she cried, wildly.

“Pearle, you love me just as well—your heart is just as much mine now as it ever was?” he asked, bending eagerly toward her, his agonized eyes searching her face.

She lifted her white face with its hopeless eyes for an instant to his; she threw out her hands toward him with a despairing gesture.

“Richard! oh, Richard! you know I have no right to tell you that now,” she moaned, and dropped her beautiful head upon her knees.

Captain Byrnholm stood a moment in thought; then, with a stern, set face, went to the door and drew the Earl of Derwentwater within.

CHAPTER XIII.

"GOOD-BY FOREVER!"

Richard then gave him an outline of what he had just related to Pearle, explaining all that he consistently could regarding the mystery of the Dove-cote, concerning which Pearle's wild words had puzzled him greatly and troubled him exceedingly.

"I do not wonder that she has been driven to such a desperate measure," he said, with a pitying glance at his sister. "Things certainly looked very badly for you as they were represented to her, and after seeing what she did at the Dove-cote."

"I know it—I realize it. Oh! if she had but charged me with it before it was too late!" he cried, despairingly.

"You do not consider the pride of our race, my friend. She believed she had been fooled and duped in the worst way imaginable, and all her pride arose in rebellion against you."

"I see; I was wrong to keep this matter about Ariel from her. I could at least have told her as much as I have to-day; but I had the same as pledged myself to keep even her existence a secret. However, that is past now; and, hopeless as everything seems, yet I cannot relinquish all hope. Allstone, this marriage—a forced

one—is no marriage; it can be annulled," Richard said, eagerly.

The earl shook his head doubtfully.

"I fear, Richard, it could hardly be called a forced marriage—instead, only the mad act of a rash, almost insane girl. Oh! my dear sister, why did you not confide in me?" he asked, with sorrowful reproach.

"Because I *dared* not. *He* said he would not spare Richard a single moment if I told any one," Pearle answered, her head still bowed upon her knees.

"The wretch! I could crush his heart out with my heel," the earl said, bitterly.

Richard Byrnholm flushed a deep crimson, and the veins swelled out full and hard upon his forehead.

"There is murder in my heart, but—my hands are tied," he whispered, with a convulsive shudder and a despairing look at Pearle.

Adison Cheetham was now the husband of the woman whom he idolized, and Pearle, if she were made free that moment, would never marry his murderer.

"Allstone," he cried, turning almost fiercely to the earl, "give me a ray of hope—is there no possible way out of this trouble?"

"None save death, I fear," was the sad reply. "You know our English laws are very strict regarding the marriage contract. That Pearle has really been driven into this union there can be no doubt; but it would be very difficult to prove it, in the face of the opposing testimony which would be brought to bear against us, should we carry the matter into court. There are plenty of witnesses who would be obliged to swear that she asked and obtained your consent to release her from her engagement to you before she entered the church; and, besides, her voluntary

appearance at the altar with that villain would hardly look as if she had been forced into the marriage."

"I see; I see," Richard replied, with a groan.

Too well he knew the rigid code regarding marriage and divorce that prevailed in England. But every feeling of his nature rebelled against the cruel fate that had separated him from the woman he so fondly loved.

"Oh, Pearle, if you had but trusted me!" the earl said, gloomily, as he paced excitedly back and forth before her.

"Don't, Allstone—don't! I told you I dare not; and every proof seemed so incontestable," the stricken girl moaned, helplessly.

"I know; but if such had been really the fact, you ought to have allowed the punishment to fall where it was merited. You had no right to sacrifice yourself, even to shield the man you loved from the consequences of his crime."

"I know it, but there was where I was weak. I loved Richard—ah! you can never know how well," she cried, raising her clasped hands above her head with a gesture of misery; "and I thought that no torture could be so great as that of seeing him disgraced, his name ruined, and all his sin made public. Don't reproach me, Allstone—all the future will do that, without the additional weight of your displeasure."

The earl went to her and took her tenderly in his arms, conscience-smitten that he should have added a pang to what she already suffered.

"My poor girl!" he said, tenderly; "I would do anything to save you from this trouble. Let us look this matter squarely in the face now, and see what can be done."

He put her gently back in her chair, and turned his

perplexed face to Richard, as if he thought he would suggest something.

For the moment, Richard lost all control of himself—hatred, anger, bitterness raged hotly within him.

"Pearle," he said, going to her and kneeling by her side, "this dreadful thing is too—too hard to bear. Say but the word, and I will go out and fight that wretch; and, if I do, you may be sure I shall *kill* him."

She shivered as with the cold.

"Hush, Richard! that must not be. I must not allow you to stain your hands with human blood," she whispered.

"No; for that would separate us just as effectually," he answered, brokenly. "But, oh! my lost Pearle, what am I going to do—how can I bear the long years that must follow this fatal day?" and his head dropped heavily upon the arm of her chair.

"How can either of us bear them?" she moaned; and lifting one hand, she laid it gently on his bowed head, toying unconsciously with the masses of hair as she had been wont to do.

The fond, familiar act broke him down completely, and great sobs shook his manly form with a force that was frightful to witness. The earl could not bear it, and walked to the window to hide his own emotion.

But the fair bride sat apparently unmoved, except for the hopeless, agonized look upon her face. No tears dimmed her eyes, which, however, were startlingly bright, and no sobs shook her form. It was as if all feeling had, for the time, been paralyzed.

"You love me, Pearle? Do not—oh! do not refuse me the comfort of that knowledge," Richard pleaded, lifting his head and searching her face with a hungry look.

"How I have loved you, you can never know. I do

love you now too well, and for my idolatry I am thus punished," she returned, in a hollow voice.

"Darling, do not say that this misery has been sent upon you for love of me; and yet your words have comforted me greatly. My own love," he continued, bending toward her and touching her burning forehead with his lips, "it is for the last time. I have no right any longer to speak to you as I have been speaking; but, at heart, I know you still belong to me. I shall wait, Pearle, always hoping that some time I shall have my own again—if not here, hereafter. I will try to bear it all patiently for your sake, and you must do the same for me. If ever you should be in any trouble—if ever you should need any protection that I can give you, send to me, and nothing shall keep me from you."

She could not bear it—he was torturing her with every word he uttered; and putting him from her, she rose from her chair, that terrible stare that he had seen in the vestibule of the church in her eyes, while her lips moved in indistinct mutterings.

"What are you going to do, Pearle?" the earl asked, coming forward and taking her hands in his. He, too, was frightened by her appearance.

"God knows; I do not!" she cried, passionately, and breaking from his hold.

At this moment a peremptory knock sounded on the door. The earl went to open it. Adison Cheetham stood without, his face livid with anger. He entered the room, and walked directly to Pearle.

"Well," she said, facing him with a look that made him cringe; "what will you have?"

"*My wife!*" he answered, with a leer at Richard Byrnholm.

The young man clenched his hands and ground his teeth. It was no ordinary self-control that kept him from striking the villain dead at his feet.

"It is not according to my ideas of propriety for the wife of one man to be holding private interviews with another," the angry husband sneered, with a sullen look at his haughty bride.

"*You* will please observe the 'propriety' of keeping a civil tongue in your head while you remain in this house," said the earl, sternly, and advancing toward him.

He bowed with mock humility at this remark; then, addressing Pearle again, he asked:

"Mrs. Cheetham, how soon will you be ready to depart? Our carriage is at the door."

He could almost see her flesh creep with horror at his words. She opened her lips to speak, closed them, thought a moment, and then, to the infinite surprise of all, replied quite calmly:

"I cannot be ready in less than an hour."

"Margaret!" exclaimed her brother, aghast; "surely you do not mean to spend even one hour of your life with this traitor!"

She gave him a quick, searching glance; then, drawing herself more proudly erect, she returned, quietly:

"I believe I spoke distinctly. I can be ready to leave Ashton Manor within an hour."

"Pearle, you *shall not* sacrifice yourself thus. This wretch who has tricked you into this marriage shall never take you from this house; neither shall he go unpunished for his treachery. I swear it!" the Earl of Derwentwater said, excitedly.

"No; I do not think he will go unpunished. His retri-

bution begins from this moment," the pale bride answered, with a strange smile on her snow-like face.

Adison Cheetham did not like either the smile or the tone in which she spoke, and a feeling of uneasiness and dread began to creep over him.

Pearle moved toward the door, but her brother intercepted her.

"Pearle, you *will* not—you *must* not go with him," he pleaded. "This can be your home just the same as it has always been, and no one shall dare to trouble you. I will care for you tenderly, my precious sister, and your future shall be as peaceful as fondest love can make it."

She shook her head sadly, but a great trembling seized her. He took both her hands, and drew her to him.

"Do not break my heart, Margaret—stay with me," he whispered; then, as there was no sign of relenting in her white face, he added, sternly: "I shall not allow you to depart with this man—I forbid it."

"Are you not rather overstepping the bounds of your authority, my lord?" asked Adison Cheetham, sneeringly. "A woman properly belongs to her husband after her marriage, and owes him obedience."

"Silence!" commanded his lordship; then to Pearle: "My dearest, will you still let me take care of you?"

"No, Allstone. I must pay the price of my own folly. I cannot bring any more trouble upon you than I have already done. Kiss me, dear brother; I will take leave of you here. Forgive me for the sorrow I have caused you to-day. Give Annie my kindest love, and kiss the darlings for me. Farewell, dear; I shall not be able to say it again. You have ever been the kindest, the best of brothers to me. I am going to my room now, but do

not allow any one to disturb me, for I need a little time to myself."

She had spoken quietly, collected, and as if all feeling was dead. She was so unnaturally calm that a sudden fear startled her brother. He put his lips to her ear, and whispered something there.

"No," she answered, with a scornful wreathing of her lips. "Do not fear that I shall add to your misery in that way."

"What is this—what are you two plotting?" Adison Cheetham demanded, coming close to them and searching her face with his evil eyes.

Pearle shivered as she met them; then the old pride returned to her. She lifted her hand and pointed to the door.

"Go!" she said. "One hour is all I ask of you."

He hesitated. He feared something, though he knew not what.

"Go!" she repeated, and he dared not disobey that tone and look.

Casting a look of defiance at his lordship, and another of mingled hate and triumph upon Richard, he reluctantly quitted the apartment. The moment the door closed after him, Pearle threw herself into her brother's arms.

"Allstone," she moaned, lifting her still tearless eyes in a pitying way to him, "I have been blind, mad, wicked—forgive me for the mortification and disgrace which this day's doings will bring upon you. Say that you forgive me before I go."

"I do forgive you, my darling. My poor child, your own sufferings will be tenfold more than mine. But do not persist in your folly by going with that wretch," he answered, kindly, yet earnestly.

"Hush!" she whispered, with a glance at Richard. "I *could* not stay here now. I alone have brought all this trouble upon those I love best, and I must take the consequences as they come. Say no more, Allstone, for you only plead in vain. I have decided upon the course I am to pursue, and nothing can move me."

She wound her fair arms about his neck, and kissed him three times upon his mouth.

"Good-by! good-by! Oh, if I could but die here!" she cried; then tearing herself from his encircling arms, she sprang toward the door.

A sharp cry of pain arrested her.

"Pearle, can you leave me without a word?" Richard said, almost fiercely, and tottering toward her.

She turned and put out her fair hands to stop him, while, with her burning eyes fixed with a longing, hungry gaze on his face, she said, more mournfully than it is possible to describe:

"Richard, I dare not take the farewell of you that my heart craves. I must fly from your presence, for I am not strong. I must not touch your hand; I ought not even look on your face. You and I must walk separate paths henceforth. Forget if you can the bitterness of this hour, and the desolateness I have brought upon you. My love, my love—for such you will be till I die—good-by forever."

Before he could utter one word in reply to this wild, passionate farewell, she was gone from the room; and, weak and trembling, more miserable than he had ever believed it possible for mortal to be, he crept to a sofa and threw himself prostrate upon it.

Pearle sped with the fleetness of the wind after leaving them up a back stairway to her own room, where she

found her faithful Elizabeth awaiting her to assist in preparing her for her journey.

CHAPTER XIV.

BAFFLED.

The guests who had gathered at Ashton Manor to celebrate the marriage of the beautiful girl whom almost every one loved, were filled with consternation at the strange events that had occurred that morning.

Many who had been at the church and had cards for the wedding breakfast, perceiving that something dreadful had happened, had the good taste to return to their homes instead of following the bridal party back to the Manor House.

But there were many guests visiting there—many had come from a great distance, and could not return at once—and they were all congregated in the library and great hall, no one presuming to interrupt that stormy interview in the drawing-room.

After Pearle retired to her own room, the earl sought these guests, and they all knew from his face that one of the bitterest disappointments of his life had come upon him that day.

“My friends” he said, with a wan smile, “our gayeties will necessarily have to be interrupted to-day, since the bride and groom feel obliged to hasten their departure.”

He then led the way to the great hall, where the splendid banquet awaited them, and desired that every one

would partake freely and excuse him, as he had much to attend to just then.

The guests all felt that this was the wisest disposition to make of them ; and although no one felt any appetite for the dainties provided for them, yet they made a pretense of eating, for the very good reason that they did not know what else to do with themselves.

A half-hour passed, during which Adison Cheetham, in no enviable frame of mind, paced back and forth in the grand salon, himself its only occupant, every one seeming to shun the man who had proved himself so base a traitor. He was a man whom one almost intuitively shunned, and his whole life, with one or two exceptions, had been devoid of friendship, and one of loneliness and isolation.

His father had been an impoverished land proprietor, owning acres upon acres of worn-out upland and meadow, with no money and too little energy to try to retrieve it. He belonged, however, to a good old family, but having had the misfortune to marry beneath himself, and being of a gloomy and misanthropic disposition, he had become discouraged early in life, settled down to a shiftless way of living, and died in poverty when his son was thirteen years of age. His wife survived him only a year or two, and then Adison, disgusted with his home and all its surroundings, ran away, leaving only his impoverished estates to the care of his guardian.

He was, strange to say, just the reverse of his father in disposition, and possessed of an indomitable will and energy, and early vowed that he would die a rich man—that no such miserable existence as had been his parents' should be dragged out by him.

His first desire was to obtain a thorough education, and with that end in view, he hired himself out as a common

laborer, and for three years worked with might and main to accumulate money, saving every penny of his earnings, and allowing himself only the bare necessities of life. His nights were spent in hard study, and, at the age of eighteen, he was prepared to pass examination and enter an excellent school where gentlemen's sons were educated, paying half the tuition demanded and being permitted to work out the other half by acting as usher to the preceptor.

It was here that he met Richard Byrnholm, who entered a year after he became a pupil. He saw at once what a free, generous-hearted boy he was, and inwardly resolved to make him a stepping-stone to an easier life for himself. In a hundred ways he fleeced his rich young friend. He pretended to be in debt, and deeply troubled on account of it, hinting at the same time that his high spirit would never allow him to borrow the sums necessary to pay his liabilities; but at last, through much urging, he consented—to *oblige his friend*—to accept his aid, Richard good-naturedly saying he had more money than he knew what to do with, and he need never trouble himself on account of it.

These debts, it is needless to say, were all imaginary, and the moneys thus obtained were put out at a good round interest for future use. Whenever the two were off on a frolic, Richard always insisted upon paying the bills, and frequently handing his purse to Adison, would commission him to settle. Sometimes these bills were larger than he deemed exactly just, but with his confidence in his friend, he never dreamed that many a pound in this way was slyly pocketed by the cunning schemer, who chuckled to himself over the greenness of his victim.

After the loss of his degree and the prize for which he had toiled so hard, he did not get on quite so well; and

at length, seeing that Richard would far outstrip him in a short time, he resolved he would leave the school for a year, or at least until Richard should be out of the way, for his anger was so bitter toward him that he feared he should commit some violent act which would disgrace him if he was continually goaded by his presence. In this way he lost the whole year of his life of which he told Pearle.

The two young men had only met once since their school-days, and that was upon the occasion of Adison's securing the commission for Richard which he hoped would result in obliterating from the earth the enemy he so hated.

He had not been idle during these years, and he was fast accomplishing his vow to be rich. He had invented a little attachment to a certain kind of machinery that was paying him a large royalty; his really fine estate was fast being redeemed, and, altogether, he was getting to be quite a prosperous gentleman.

When Richard had written him concerning his engagement, he had rallied him upon still being a bachelor, although several years older than himself.

When he had at length come to Linden Grange to spend a month and be present at his wedding, Richard resumed his bantering, and Adison told him he had never yet met the woman whom he was willing to make the mistress of Pelham Pines, that being the name of his estate.

Richard laughingly replied that he would introduce him to all the fine young ladies in the vicinity, and he could take his choice among them, little thinking *whom* he would select from among all those fair ones.

The reader knows all that followed, and with this bird's-eye view of his past, we will return to the restless groom

as he paces so impatiently up and down the great drawing-room at Ashton Manor.

The hour that Pearle had demanded has almost expired—only five minutes remain, and he glances continually at the clock, growing strangely nervous with every vanishing minute.

No one has come near him during all this time. Every one had, as it were, fled from his presence as from some thing of evil; though the Earl of Derwentwater, gentle Alice Arnaut, with one or two others, had gathered at the foot of the grand stairway, and were waiting in silent suspense for the appearance of the unhappy bride—waiting for one last embrace and farewell, before she should go forth to her unloved and unloving life.

Richard Byrnholm still lay prostrate upon the sofa in the reception-room, great heart-rending sighs bursting from him every now and then, while he, too, was listening for the last sound of those light footsteps which had ever until now thrilled his heart with joy and hope.

A strange oppression—a weird stillness, had crept over the whole house. The hour was out—she had not come! Ten minutes more went by, and the hush, the suspense was becoming intolerable.

The impatient horses without stamped and pawed the ground, champing their bits restlessly at being kept waiting so long. The servants moved about with noiseless tread, every now and then peeping into the great hall at that silent, waiting group, and wondering what would be the next act in the strange drama.

Fifteen minutes passed, and Adison Cheetham could bear it no longer; every sound made him shiver, every movement almost made his hair stand on end.

With heavy tread and gloomy brow, he strode to the

bell-rope and gave it a violent pull. Almost instantly a servant appeared in the door-way.

"Go to Mrs. Cheetham's door and say that the train leaves in half an hour, and I do not wish to miss it," he commanded, in no gentle tones.

The servant bowed and retired, muttering, with a ghastly grin, something about a desire that they "might *cheet* 'im, after all."

He passed solemnly up the great stairway, turned to the left in the upper corridor, and rapped upon Pearle's door. There was no answer; an ominous silence prevailed there as well as below.

He knocked again, with the same result. He turned the handle, the door yielded, and he entered. There was no one within.

He passed through the charming boudoir to the bedroom door, and rapped upon that. Still no answer. He pushed it open. He could see Pearle's bridal dress lying all in a heap upon the bed, where it had been hastily and carelessly thrown; one glove lay upon the floor, the other on a chair; the small white satin boots, with their embroidery of seed pearls, were tossed into one corner; but there was no other sign nor sound of the fair young bride in the room.

The man's face began to grow white with a sudden fear, and he turned to retrace his steps, when he encountered Elizabeth in the hall. Her eyes were red and swollen with weeping, and her whole manner betrayed great sorrow and agitation.

"Where is Miss Pearle?" the man asked of her.

"Is she not within her room?" she questioned, evasively, and without meeting his eye.

"No; and I'll wager that the very old Nick's to pay,"

he answered, as he stole softly down the stairway, with a crest-fallen air, but withal a gleam of triumph in his eye; for there was not a servant at Ashton Manor who could endure "Master Richard's Cheat," as he was slyly called among them.

He passed straight by that group at the foot of the stairs, and presenting himself before the impatient husband, said, as he bowed with mock reverence:

"Madam is not in her room, sir."

"What! Where is she, then?" he demanded, in a startled tone, and with a muttered oath.

"I could not say, sir," replied the unruffled servant.

"Go and find her; and don't return until you can bring me some message from her," he roared, and then recommenced his pacing up and down the room.

"What is it, John?" the earl asked, anxiously, as the man came out of the salon. "Miss Pearle not in her rooms?"

"No, my lord."

"Are you sure?" the earl asked, in a startled way.

"Yes, my lord. There was no one in Miss Radcliffe's rooms?"

How they all avoided speaking of Pearle by her new name!

"Where is Elizabeth?"

"Up stairs, my lord. I met her going into Miss Pearle's room as I was coming out; and—and, your lordship," the man continued, speaking in a whisper, "the apartments were in great disorder."

"Go and send Elizabeth to me," the Earl of Derwent-water commanded, with a very white face.

John departed, and Elizabeth soon made her appear-

ance, her swollen eyes testifying to the fact that some deep grief lay heavy on her heart.

"Where is your mistress, Elizabeth?" the earl asked, trying to speak calmly.

"I don't know, my lord."

"You don't know! Where have you been during the last hour and a half?"

"Part of the time with Miss Pearle, and part of the time in my own room."

"How was that, when you should have been assisting her to prepare for her journey?" he demanded, sternly.

"I did assist her, my lord, to change her dress; then she told me that she was not going to take me with her—that she should not need me, and it nearly broke my heart, sir."

The girl began to sob again, but kept looking at her master, as if she wanted to say more but dare not in the presence of others.

"Well, that is very strange," he answered, with clouded brow. "Of course she cannot go without you; she must have been wild to have thought of such a thing."

The girl now leaned forward and whispered something in his ear.

The earl uttered a low exclamation of dismay, grew white as the tie about his neck, and then, turning, bounded up the stairs two steps at a time. He hurried to Pearle's rooms, and going to her writing-desk, found there a note directed to him.

Elizabeth had whispered that "*Pearle was gone*, but had left a letter for him."

He seized it, and read:

"Adison Cheetham can take his departure from Ashton Manor with all possible dispatch, since no one will accompany him. Did he think

that because he succeeded in compelling me to sacrifice all my future hopes, that I would humiliate myself sufficiently to carry out that fraud—that miserable mockery perpetrated in the church to-day? Never! I may be his wife in name—let him gather what comfort he can from that fact, since the bare fact alone remains to him, for when this is read I shall be beyond his reach. And now let him beware that he does not cross my path in the future, for I will not spare him if he attempts to hunt me down. *I will never consent to abide in his presence for a single hour.*”

A little space was left, and then underneath was written :

“My dear brother, forgive me for going without your consent or knowledge. I cannot remain where everything so forcibly reminds me of all I have lost. *I will not* go with that man, and I shall be more content in obscurity. Do not search for me, for nothing would tempt me to return here, at least at present; but if, in the future, my sore heart will ever let me come back to the shelter of your care and love, be sure that I shall do so. Again forgive me for the sorrow I have so rashly brought upon you all, and comfort my—Richard, if you can.

PEARLE.”

In spite of his horror and dismay at this unexpected act, the earl heaved a sigh of relief that she had escaped from the power of that villain below. He simply could not endure the thought of her going with him—he would rather have laid her in the grave; and it was with a somewhat lighter heart that he went below, taking her note with him. He went directly to Adison Cheetham, and gave it to him.

“Read that, then *go!*” he said, sternly.

With a face of marble, Adison Cheetham grasped the paper and read the scathing words she had written.

“You have done this to cheat me of my wife,” he cried, trembling with mortification and passion, when he had read it through.

“Go! and never set your foot upon my premises again,” was all the reply that his lordship deigned.

"I will not leave this place until the house has been thoroughly searched. You have hidden her from me, and now bring me this miserable subterfuge. I was a fool to trust her one moment from my sight," the thwarted husband exclaimed, angrily.

The earl's eyes flashed dangerously.

"You know all that I do of this wretched business," he said, pointing to the words Pearle had written. "She is gone—where, I do not know; I never suspected her intention. You cannot search this house, and you will leave it immediately, or I shall take measures to have you forcibly ejected."

There was no mistaking the tone of this command—the edict had gone forth, and it was final. Adison Cheetham knew he would only bring additional disgrace upon himself if he refused to obey; and, with a look of indescribable hate and malice at the haughty earl, he turned and left the place without a word.

Another moment and the sound of horse's hoofs upon the graveled drive-way proclaimed that he was gone, and a sigh of relief escaped from the breast of every one of the group in the hall who had witnessed his departure, as if with his presence some spirit of evil had flown.

CHAPTER XV.

GOOD-BY TO THE OLD LIFE.

The earl then sought his guests, and explained in as few words as possible what had happened, and nearly every one expressed intense satisfaction that the girl whom they

had all admired had thus escaped her treacherous husband's power.

To Richard Byrnholm the intelligence was most welcome. He could better bear to think of her in almost any condition in life than as the wife and constant companion of such a wretch as Adison Cheetham had proved himself to be.

But how had all this been accomplished—how had Pearle managed to escape from Ashton Manor and no one cognizant of the fact? Something of the circumstances the earl and his guests learned from Elizabeth, who had reluctantly assisted her.

When the luckless bride sped from the reception-room to her own, one thought alone filled her mind—to fly from the place and put miles and miles between her and the hated being who had doomed her to a life-long misery. From the moment in which she had decided to yield to his demands, she had also planned to do this thing.

She had cunningly resolved to tacitly submit to the dreadful ceremony that should bind her with the most galling chains by which mortal was ever bound, get possession of the evidence that would ruin Richard if made public, and then hide herself forever from Adison Cheetham's sight. Render him the duties and obedience of a wife she *never* would; she might be obliged to yield to the letter of the law, but the spirit of it she never could—she never *would* keep. Once within her room, she turned to her maid.

"Elizabeth, get this finery off of me with all possible dispatch," she said, at the same time tearing off the costly gloves and casting them from her; and in five minutes the faithful girl had removed the elegant wedding dress, the

dainty boots and silken hose, replacing them with others more suitable for traveling.

"Now bring me the dress you were intending to travel in yourself," Pearle commanded

"Miss Pearle," began the astonished girl.

"Bring it," the pale bride repeated, impatiently.

"What are you going to do, Miss Pearle?" the girl ventured to ask.

"I am going to run away," she answered, fiercely. "I am going to run away from the vilest brute in the shape of a man that ever trod the earth."

"Great Heaven!" gasped the maid, starting back in affright at her manner.

"Now, Elizabeth, make haste if you love me," Pearle went on, more gently. "Bring me the dress you were to have worn yourself; no matter if it does not fit me, it is about the right length. Get your own traveling bag, and put me up a few necessary articles. Get a roll of bills which you will find in my desk, and put part into my purse and the rest into the bag. There," she went on, as Elizabeth brought the neat, dark dress that she had made with so much pride to wear on the wedding journey; "that will disguise me nicely. Now work nimbly, while I put it on, and I will tell you something of my plans; but you must breathe them to no one but my brother, and not to him until I am well out of the way. I cannot tell you much, for there is not time; but you must know that only dire necessity, the most abject fear, would have compelled me to the course I have pursued to-day. And, ah, me! all for naught. Of course I hate the man who now claims me as his wife"—she shuddered at the word—"of course I can never exist in his presence one moment. I am going away where no one can find me, for a while at least—

perhaps forever," she added, with an expression of agony on her white face, while with trembling fingers she fastened the dress, and then put on the mantle belonging to it. "Have you got everything I need in the bag," she asked, hurriedly,

"Yes, Miss Pearle; but, oh! my dear young lady, let me go with you; you are not fit to go away by yourself," pleaded the faithful girl, with a burst of tears.

"No, Elizabeth; that would never do. I must go by myself, and bear my punishment alone."

"But what will you do?—you have never even dressed yourself alone in all your life. Miss Pearle, you will die if you go out into the cold world alone."

"It would be better, perhaps, if it should prove so," the fair bride said, bitterly.

"No, no; don't talk so wildly, so hopelessly, my lady. Let me go with you; I will serve you gladly; I will go to the ends of the earth with you," Elizabeth begged, burying her face in the folds of her mistress' dress and sobbing wildly.

"Get up, Elizabeth," Pearle commanded, sternly, to keep herself from breaking down at this evidence of the girl's faithfulness. "Get up," she repeated. "I have no time to spend in useless repining; I must be far from here before another half hour has elapsed. Bring me your hat and veil and your traveling shawl."

Elizabeth brought them, her honest face almost convulsed with grief, and the tears pouring over her cheeks.

"Now get me the darkest pair of gloves you can find—those will do," as the maid took up a pair lying on the dressing-case. "Ah!" Pearle cried, with an expression of horror, as she was about drawing one of them on.

She had caught the gleam of her wedding-ring. She

had not realized until that moment that she wore one, not having been conscious when it had been put upon her finger.

She wrenched it off with angry vehemence, and threw it, with a motion of disgust, into the grate, where a slow fire was burning.

"So perish every hope that *he* may have in this life," she said, bitterly, and never dreamed that the impulsive words were to prove a solemn prophecy. "There, I believe I am ready," she continued, when the last glove was buttoned. "Now, Elizabeth, I want you to go and tell William to saddle Prince. If he asks you why or wherefore, tell him you have an errand to do for me in great haste. When the horse is ready, bring him around to the group of poplars by the south tower door. Hasten, for I have not a moment to lose."

With a nearly breaking heart, Elizabeth went to do her mistress' bidding; while Pearle sat down and hurriedly penciled those lines to her brother which had caused such consternation to Adison Cheetham.

Scarce five minutes elapsed ere Elizabeth was back again. With all her sorrow at losing her dear lady, she could not help rejoicing to know that she was determined to be free.

"Prince is ready, Miss Pearle; he is under the shade of the poplars. The servants are all employed in the basement and dining-room, and not a soul is to be seen on the south side of the house," she said, trembling with excitement.

"Thank you; that is just as I wish it. Now, good-by, Elizabeth. You have been very kind and faithful to me, and I shall never forget it. If I should never return——"

"Oh, Miss Pearle, don't!" interrupted the girl, throwing her arms around her with a gesture of despair.

"Hush! do not grieve so. It is better for me to go, for my life here is ruined. Now, do not let any one know that I have gone until inquiry is made. Give me all the **time** you can. Unpack those trunks," she added, as her eye fell upon her traveling trunks, which were strapped and ready for the journey, "and help yourself to as many of their contents as you like. I give you anything you may choose, for your faithfulness to me. Good-by, my long-tried Elizabeth."

She bent forward and kissed the weeping girl on the forehead, and then, without a backward glance, walked quickly from the room, drawing a thick veil over her face as she went.

She stole down the same unfrequented stairway that she had traversed the night previous, cautiously opened the south tower door, and peered out.

Not a person was in sight, as Elizabeth had told her, and her trusty horse was quietly standing under the thick shadow of the poplars.

She glided out, stepped lightly to his side, sprang into the saddle, and turning her back, as she believed, forever on her home, she took a foot-path that led into a thick growth of wood that stretched away to the south of the manor house.

This path led at length to an unfrequented cart-road, which finally came out into a small manufacturing town about five miles away.

When Pearle reached the outskirts of this town, she dismounted and turned her horse's head back in the direction of Ashton Manor, then tied his bridle to the pommel

of her saddle, with the intention of sending him home alone.

He was a horse that she had owned for years. He had been broken when a colt for her special use, and she had grown to love him as a dear friend.

A great choking lump came into her throat as he turned his kind, questioning eyes upon her while she tied the bridle, seeming to know that something was wrong with her. She put both arms around his neck and leaned her head against him, while a sob burst from her, as she murmured :

“Good-by, my faithful Prince—the last familiar object my eyes may rest upon, perhaps forever. Dear old horse, you and I have spent many a happy hour together, and I know you’ll miss the loving hand that has guided you for so many years. Dear Prince—good fellow,” she continued, patting him fondly and laying her cheek against his shining neck, as if she could not bear to let him go, while the tears, for the first time on that dreadful day, gathered in her eyes and ran over her pale face.

The intelligent animal appeared to know that she was in trouble, for he rubbed his head softly against her shoulder and whinnied wistfully.

But it would not do to give way to her feelings now ; there was no time for repining or vain regrets. Giving him one last hug, and leaving a kiss on his sleek neck, she said, in a firm, authoritative tone :

“Prince, go home now.”

She gave him a smart blow with her whip. The horse pricked up his ears in surprise, gave a bound, and was gone from her sight in less time than it takes to relate it.

“And so good-by to all the old life,” Pearle said, bitterly, and with quivering lips, as he disappeared from view.

Tossing her whip among the bushes, she picked up her bag and shawl from the ground and turned her steps toward the railway-station in the village.

"Does the London express stop here?" she asked, walking up to the station-master as she entered the waiting-room.

"It do not, miss—leastwise, not regular. When his honor Mr. Ruggles wants to go to the city, then we signal it to stop," he answered, good-naturedly.

Pearle knew that his honor Mr. Ruggles was the great manufacturer of the place, and her heart beat fast with a nervous fear as she put her next question :

"Will it stop to-day?"

"Yes, miss, it will. I got word half an hour back to signal the train."

A sigh of relief escaped her at this intelligence. Only three-quarters of the hour that she had claimed for herself was yet gone. She knew the express train was due at this place somewhere about this time, and she had fled hither, hoping to be able to catch it.

"Want to go up to Lunnon, miss?" asked the station-master, having noted the sigh.

"Yes;" and with eager, trembling fingers she drew forth her purse and paid for her ticket.

"How long before the train will pass?" she asked, anxiously.

"You're just about on time, miss; there's the whistle now," the man returned, as the quick, sharp blast of a locomotive sounded about a mile away.

Pearle went out upon the platform, feeling deeply thankful that everything was so favorable for her escape, and glad that she had no longer to wait, since every moment of delay and suspense were torture to her.

A few moments more, and then the train thundered to the station, stopped for one brief instant, and then Pearle was whirled away—away toward the great metropolis, where, among the seething, surging multitude, she hoped to hide and be lost forever to all who had witnessed the fatal act which she had so rashly committed that day.

But who can tell what she suffered mentally as she was thus speeding away from home and all she loved? Who can describe the bitterness of her sensitive heart, or the rebellion which rent her proud nature to its very depths? With Byron, she could have said :

" Every feeling hath been shaken;
Pride, which not a world could bow,
Bows to this; and, by hope forsaken,
Even my soul forsakes me now.

" But 'tis done; *all* words are idle—
Words from *me* are vainer still;
But the thoughts we cannot bridle
Force their way without the will."

CHAPTER XVI.

"HOW CAME SHE HERE?"

When Adison Cheetham left Ashton Manor, he was nearly beside himself with rage, chagrin, and bitter disappointment. It had never occurred to him that Pearle would fly from him.

He had fondly hoped, in his mad passion for her, that if he could by any means frighten or force her into a marriage with him, he would be able, by persistent kindness

and devotion, to win her by and by to regard him with something like favor, if not affection.

He knew well enough now that she hated him with all the force of her proud nature. He knew also that she loved his enemy with a devotion of which few women were capable, and he had feared that it would be a long time before she would forgive him for the part he had played to accomplish his purpose.

But he had great confidence in his own powers. He was prospering in life now, and, with Pearle's fortune, he would be *rich*. He had resolved to spare nothing to win her if he could; he would devote all his time and energies to her happiness and pleasure, and he was confident that he should succeed eventually.

But if he did not, he had at least accomplished one object—he had avenged himself upon his enemy; he had stolen the bride and fortune that were to have been his, and Richard Byrnholm was at that moment a heart-broken, desolate man.

This had been the way he had reasoned while waiting in the grand salon at Ashton Manor for the re-appearance of his bride. But even while he was planning all this, she was flying from him as fast as steam and rapidly revolving wheels could take her; and then he had been turned in disgrace from the doors of his lordship, the Earl of Derwentwater.

He ground his teeth with rage; he muttered curses fierce and deadly upon the whole family, and more than all upon his own stupidity for not having foreseen such an event.

"I might have known by her manner, and by her cursed pride and hatred of me, that she never would consent to go with me," he said, as he sped toward Linden Grange to

get his baggage, for of course his visit there was at an end now. "And yet," he added, thoughtfully, "she pretended that she was going to accompany me—she appeared to consent. Oh, she was even then planning to fly. She knew that her lordly brother would never consent to let her leave him, and she knew that if she stayed I would never cease to haunt her. But," he cried, striking his fist fiercely against the side of the carriage, "I'll find her; I swear she shall not escape me. I will upset the whole kingdom rather than be baffled thus. That fortune, too—does she think to cheat me of that also? No; I am her husband, and she shall submit to me as such. How much I could have done with her income and mine united! I could have made the old place shine as I would like to see it; I would have run for the county membership, and I could have risen rapidly in the world."

With such gloomy reflections as these, he traversed the distance between Ashton Manor and Linden Grange. He did not alight when the carriage stopped, but putting his head out of the window, called to his valet.

"Bring the luggage, Andrew, as quickly as possible," he said.

Andrew hastened to obey. The baggage was brought and strapped upon the back of the carriage; the valet then jumped upon the seat with the driver, not caring to share the coach with his master in his present mood, and they were driven away forever from Linden Grange.

The disappointed bridegroom gave orders to be taken to the Leicester Arms, where he had decided to remain for a few days at least.

He would have been glad to have departed at once and forever from the hated place that had been the scene of his recent mortification and disappointment. But he did

not fully believe in Pearle's flight—he had a suspicion that she might be hidden safely away in some of the many apartments at Ashton Manor, and he determined to assure himself regarding this before he too should go.

He spent several days skulking around the manor house, questioning every one whom he met concerning the inmates, until at last, in his ramblings, he stumbled upon Pearle's riding-whip, which she had tossed among the bushes by the road-side after sending her horse back to her home. He recognized it at once by its beautiful inlaid handle, which he had always admired, and which had also her initials engraven on it.

This seemed to enlighten him somewhat as to her movements, and he hastened at once to the village station, where, by adroit inquiries, he learned that, on the day of the great wedding at Ashton Manor, a young woman very neatly clad in a dark traveling suit had bought a ticket for London and taken the through express which passed there at one o'clock.

"Ah! she was being whirled toward London while I was fretting and fuming, and waiting for her in the salon at the manor over yonder," Adison Cheetham growled, upon learning the above items.

But this doubtful certainty was better than no knowledge of her movements—it at least gave him a clew, and he proceeded to act upon it at once. That afternoon found him also *en route* for London, swearing that he would find her if it took him his life-time and every penny of which he was possessed.

The anxiety and excitement of the last two weeks had worn upon him sadly, strong man though he was. He had passed many a sleepless night, while the passion to which he had given vent on the morning of the wedding

had exhausted his strength not a little ; and when he found himself comfortably settled in a compartment of a railway carriage, which he had secured to himself, he lay back in his seat and gave himself up to the first real rest he had had for a fortnight. He had nearly a hundred miles to travel—it would be almost evening when he reached his destination—and fearing no interruption, he soon dropped into a deep and dreamless sleep.

The hours went by ; the train thundered on its way, bearing its precious human freight, who were all unconscious of the mournful tragedy that was to rudely shock them before the day was done.

Seventy-five miles of the way were safely traversed ; all was well, save that the train was a few minutes behind time. This, however, could easily be made up by judicious crowding, and the engineer gave himself no uneasiness on that account.

Away, away they flew over the intervening miles, fields, fences, and villages seeming literally to fly past them. Only a short distance further, and then the heaving, panting monster, that mighty, tireless giant, would become silent and motionless, while the now passive crowd would pour forth from the long train and depart upon their several ways.

Already the smoke, which always hangs over that great city, could be distinguished in the distance ; nearer and nearer it seemed to come ; fifteen minutes more, and, God willing, all would be well.

A black, gaping, wide-mouthed tunnel suddenly receives the human-freighted train ; it is lost to view, then emerging, passes safely through ; a curve, somewhat bold and abrupt, is rounded, when—ah ! what is that object just ahead ?

The faithful engineer utters a sharp cry of dismay. His heart bounds wildly in his bosom; then, as if suddenly paralyzed, drops back like a lump of lead, the shock leaving him almost without strength, his face blanching to the hue of death, while every hair upon his head seemed to rise on end.

He had seen, only a few rods away, standing between the rails, and directly in the path of his rushing engine, a dark-robed figure—like some statue carved in dusky marble—panic-stricken and motionless.

He gave shrill, sharp signals for "down brakes," instantly reversing the engine and opening the escape valves, using his utmost endeavor to slacken the speed of the train.

Still that figure stood without motion—apparently without life. He could now distinguish the white, set face, the upraised, clasped hands. Oh! if it would but *move*. Why *did* it not spring aside from the horrible danger menacing it?

The engine labored, jumped, creaked, and groaned, like some wild beast hungry for its prey, and resolutely determined to overleap every barrier.

The engineer shut his eyes to the sight he knew must greet them, while a sickening, horrible thrill ran through every vein and nerve.

A moment of awful suspense, a wild, unearthly shriek, a hardly perceptible jar, and then the engine, panting like some mighty leviathan in its death throes, its strength exhausted, its dreadful work of destruction accomplished, subsided into silence and repose.

The engineer thrust his white, horror-stricken face forth and looked back along the track. A shudder shook him

from head to foot as he saw, not far distant, a heap of *something* lying between the tracks.

"Great heavens, it is a woman!" he cried to the fireman; and jumping to the ground, he sped back toward the silent object.

By this time every passenger was on the *qui vive*. They had heard those startling whistles, proclaiming danger ahead; they had marked the efforts to slacken the speed of the train, and many a heart had grown faint with fear lest some dreadful calamity was about to overtake and destroy them just as their journey was done. Great was their consternation upon learning that a woman had been killed, and hundreds left the carriages to look upon the poor, unfortunate victim.

The engineer had been the first to reach her. He had lifted her tenderly in his arms, borne her to a grassy spot not far distant, and laid her gently down, straightening out her limbs and smoothing her clothing decently over them.

"Are you sure she is dead?" some one asked.

"Yes, she is dead," he answered, with a face of anguish; "and the first one I have killed in twenty-seven years of service. Poor thing! and she so fair and sweet to look upon, too."

The tears streamed down his face as he bent over her, smoothing the heavy hair from her fair brow, where a great bruise suggested how the cruel work had been done.

She was a young woman of apparently twenty-one or two years, and her face was very beautiful, save that unsightly mark. Her eyes were closed, and their dark fringes lying against the white cheek made it seem still fairer. Her nose was small and straight, the mouth full and sweet in expression, and the chin beautifully rounded. Her rich, abundant hair had become disarranged in her fall, and fell

around her neck and shoulders in a profusion of rippling waves. Her form was slender and graceful, and looked very trim in the neatly fitting dress she wore. The small white hands, which the tender-hearted engineer had reverently folded over her still breast, were as fair and delicate as any high-born lady's in the land, and on the third finger of her left hand there gleamed a wedding-ring.

"Who can she be?" "She is married." "How came she to be walking on the track?" were the queries and comments which were heard on every side, as one after another of the anxious passengers came to look, and then turned heart-sick away from the sad sight.

"How did it happen?" the conductor asked of the almost heart-broken engineer.

"I do not know, sir; it seems as if she might have saved herself if she had had her wits about her. We came upon her just as we rounded yonder curve. I saw her turn and look back as I whistled, and then stand still as if panic-stricken. Just before we reached her, I saw her fall—I think she must have fainted from fright. I did my best to stop the train, and the force was nearly spent when the engine hit her. If she had been a rod further on, she would have been saved."

"Are there any bones broken?" the conductor asked,

"None that I can discover," said a physician, who had been examining the woman. "Neither of her arms or legs are broken, but there may be some internal injury which caused her death."

"Ah, yes; and that cruel bruise on her forehead. Poor child, poor child! and the first one I ever killed in all my twenty-seven years of service," moaned the remorseful engineer, with quivering lips.

"The bruise could not have been the cause of her death;

I think it is not in the right place. There must be some internal injury," replied the physician.

"Are you sure, sir, that she is clean gone—can *nothing* be done?" the engineer asked, eagerly, seeming to gather something of hope from the medical man's words.

"No; nothing can be done. There is no pulse, no heart-beat, no breath. She is past all help," was the sad reply.

Still the passengers kept coming and going. There was quite a crowd gathered about the unfortunate woman, when all at once there came from the midst of it a startled, horrified cry:

"My God! how came she here?"

That was all, but every one standing there heard it, and turned involuntarily to see whence the words came.

There were white, scared faces all about, but among them all there was not one that appeared to be more so than another, and a solemn silence dropped over the spot as they waited, expecting to see some heart-broken father, brother, or husband rush forward and claim the lifeless body. But no one moved—no other word was spoken.

"Who said that? Does any one know who the unfortunate creature is?" demanded the conductor, glancing sharply around.

There was no reply, and he repeated his question in a louder tone, but with the same result; and a wondering expression came into every face, while whispers and surmises flowed from lip to lip.

Whoever had uttered that cry—whoever had spoken those words, seemed to have some powerful motive for keeping silent, upon second thought.

Only two men among the crowd knew *who* had been so startled upon beholding that white, still face upon the

grass, or who had given utterance to that frightened cry and those terrified words.

The woman's pockets were examined to see if they could discover any clew to her identity; but nothing was found save a small purse, which contained a pound note and a few pieces of silver.

The conductor, after consulting a while with some of the passengers, ordered that she be lifted into the baggage carriage and laid upon a pile of shawls and cloaks that had been volunteered for that purpose, every one seeming to feel a sort of tender pity for the beautiful stranger who had come to such a sad and untimely end. The train then moved slowly on, reaching its destination nearly an hour behind time.

The body was given into the care of the proper officials upon reaching the city, to be carried away to the morgue, there to await identification; and the busy throng went its way.

As Adison Cheetham stepped upon the platform from the carriage in which he had been riding, he met his valet, who was awaiting him, and who, on beholding him, started back with an exclamation of dismay.

"Are you ill, sir?" he asked; and well he might ask, for the man's face was perfectly colorless, and wore an expression of horror beyond description. He was shivering as if chilled through with the cold, and his teeth chattered audibly.

"No," he replied, gruffly; "but after such a cursed fright a man may be expected to look ill. It is enough to give any one the horrors to be startled from a sound sleep by such unearthly noises, and then told that we were all going straight to——"

The place of which he spoke is universally conceded to be a very warm one.

"Did you get out to look at—the—her?" inquired his servant, with an expressive shrug and emphasis.

His master swore angrily.

"What should I want to get out and look at a mangled corpse for? I had enough to do to quiet my own nerves after such a shock. I would give a hundred pounds if we had come on some other train. Ugh! what have they done with—*it*?" he asked, with a shudder, and glancing fearfully around, as if he feared that the ghost of that unfortunate woman was about to rise up and confront him.

"They are just taking her to the morgue, sir—there they go now," his valet answered, pointing to two men who were carrying a rude litter, upon which something strangely and fearfully suggestive lay, covered with a black cloth.

Adison Cheetham started violently as his eyes fell upon it, and muttering another oath, he turned quickly from the sight.

"I'll go to the *café* and get a glass of brandy to steady my nerves, while you attend to the traps," he said, and then walked abruptly away.

Andrew procured a carriage, had the baggage transferred to it, and then went to call his master, for the driver was anxious to be off, in order to return in season for another train.

Darkness had settled down upon the great city; a fine, drizzling rain was falling, and the air was keen and chill. It seemed likely to be a dismal, uncomfortable night—one to make the traveler long for his own snug home, with its cheerful lights, its blazing fires, and kindly faces.

The street lights flickered and flared, shedding ghostly

rays around, making the gloom seem even more gloomy than it really was by contrast, and casting weird shadows among the many vehicles which were waiting to receive their passengers at one end of the station.

But as Adison Cheetham came forth and entered his cab, and gave his order to be driven to the "Langham," something more substantial than a shadow might have been seen to move away from the side of the carriage which he had entered, and glide quietly away into the darkness.

CHAPTER XVII.

VISITORS AT THE MORGUE.

Adison Cheetham did not rest at all well that first night in London. He lay tossing and groaning upon his bed, and muttering strange things, until broad daylight, when he sank into a fitful slumber, which lasted until nearly noon. Then, feeling unrefreshed and wretched, he arose, bathed, dressed himself, and then ordered his breakfast to be served in his room, where he ate it silently and with thoughtful, moody brow.

His meal dispatched, he threw himself upon a couch and fell to musing. A long, long time he lay there, perfectly motionless, his lips sternly compressed, his eyes troubled and almost fierce in their expression.

"Confound my luck!" he exclaimed, with an ugly scowl. "I don't know why I should be balked like this. I never gave up anything yet that I undertook; but now that I'm here, I don't know which way to turn, and I've

not much strength or courage left for anything after the fright of last night! Ugh! I feel as if I never want to ride in a railway carriage again; and then——”

He stopped suddenly, closing his eyes with a shudder, as if thus to shut out the remembrance of an event which had thrilled so many hearts with terror.

After a few minutes he sat erect and drew out a wallet from one of his pockets. Searching in this among a promiscuous assortment of papers, he at last found what he wanted—that same little slip of printed paper which he had before examined on that day of the picnic when he had first hinted of his love to Pearle. He read it over carefully, and his gloomy brow cleared a trifle.

“There can be no mistake; I am all right,” he muttered, with a sigh of relief. “I will not worry, and I will not be turned from my purpose. I *will* find that girl; she need not think to escape me. I have not gone thus far on a difficult road to be daunted and foiled when a little perseverance and a bold front may help me to win. If she is in London—if she is in England—if she is in the *world*, I’ll *find* and *conquer* her. Still, if”—the anxious look returned to his brow as his eye fell again upon the slip he held. “I wish I was quite sure about this; I wish—pooh! of course it is all right,” he continued, with a shrug of impatience, as he returned it to his wallet and arose to his feet. “I will not give it another thought—I will not be frightened by a shadow, a suspicion; and yet”—his soliloquy was concluded with a shudder.

It was nearly three o’clock when he finally emerged from his sumptuous apartment and repaired to the public smoking-room, where he procured a newspaper and a cigar, and proceeded to inform himself regarding current events. Almost the first thing his eyes encountered was an account

of the railway accident which had occurred the previous evening.

With a muttered oath and a gesture of disgust, he instantly threw the paper from him, started to his feet and went to overlook a game of billiards that was being played in another part of the room. He was evidently very nervous and ill at ease, for when, after he had watched it a few moments, the players began discussing the very subject which annoyed him so, he cast a look of angry impatience at them, walked to a window and began drumming nervously upon the pane.

The day was not at all propitious for weak or irritated nerves. There was nothing cheerful or comfortable about it, for a dismal rain continued to fall, the air was damp and chill, and everything, without and within, wore a gloomy aspect.

From the window, where he stood motionless and apparently absorbed in thought for nearly an hour, Adison Cheetham went to the public entrance hall, where, for the space of another half hour, he paced back and forth in moody silence.

At the end of that time he sent his valet for his hat and overcoat, and putting them on, he went forth into the rain and wind and mud—anything evidently was preferable to the companionship of his own thoughts.

The dark day was fast deepening into a darker night; the heavy clouds and rain, combined with the smoky atmosphere of the city, made it seem much later than the hour indicated.

In a remote street, and one not much frequented even on a pleasant evening, there might have been seen a solitary figure wending its way with nervous and uneven tread.

Every now and then it glanced back, as if fearful of being observed, then sped on more quickly than before.

His fears, if fears he had, were not wholly without reason; for on the opposite pavement, muffled to the ears in a heavy cloak, another figure followed him at a little distance, and with almost noiseless tread.

At length the first pedestrian turned a corner into a narrow street, even more gloomy than the other had been.

Quickening his steps, that other figure followed more closely now, and all at once, stopping short, he muttered, with a chuckle of triumph:

"Aha! I thought so."

The occasion of this was that the first figure had also stopped before a grim-looking building, and after glancing cautiously and anxiously around, entered the place.

It was the morgue!

He walked up to the official, who was pacing in the waiting-room, and said, abruptly and nervously:

"I wish to view the body that was brought here last night."

"Which one, sir? There were four brought here last night," returned the man, in a surly tone, while he ceased his perambulations and eyed the new-comer keenly.

"The body of the—woman who was killed by the railway train," was the reply, accompanied by a shiver.

It was a dismal place, and the dampness and gloom, and the moldy smell pervading the atmosphere, were terribly suggestive of the business transacted there.

"Can't, sir—body's been taken," said the official, with rude brevity.

"Taken!" was the breathless exclamation.

The man nodded.

"When?"

"Early this morning."

"Who identified it—who claimed it?" the stranger asked, tugging at his neck-tie as if it was uncomfortably tight, while his speech was thick with emotion of some kind.

"Can't say—friends, of course. None of my business, as I knows on, since the papers are all right and I does my duty," was the gruff response, from which the man before him was led to infer that as he was evidently not a friend, it was none of his business either.

"Who was she? Did you learn her name?" he persisted, lifting his hat and wiping the sweat from his forehead with a hand that trembled visibly.

The official shook his head with a contemptuous look, as if he did not trouble himself about the names of the countless unfortunates who were brought there. He then turned abruptly and resumed his paces, thus signifying his unwillingness to answer further idle questions.

To do him justice, he believed the man had only come there out of curiosity, as hundreds did, to view a body that had been crushed and mangled by the cars. The body had been taken away in the morning, as he had said; that business had been settled, and he had no desire to rehearse it. The night was cold, the place was ghostly and disagreeable, it was nearly time to shut it up and go home, and he was impatient of anything to detain him there; and, altogether, he was not in a very comfortable frame of mind, while there was a superciliousness in both the tone and manner of his visitor, spite of his nervousness, that angered and annoyed him.

The stranger, seeing that he could gain nothing more from him, also turned, and he staggered dizzily as he did so. His face was as ghastly as any face of those strange

dead lying within that dreadful place, and he drew a long breath, that was very like a groan, as he groped his way out of the wretched place, and disappeared in the darkness.

He was wholly oblivious of the fact that another person was standing in the shadow of the open door as he departed, or that a pair of keen, dark eyes were intently watching his every movement, and a pair of as keen ears had caught every eager, agitated question he had asked.

As soon as the last sound of his footsteps died away outside, he also walked quietly up to the official, and adroitly dropping a golden coin into his hand, began plying him with queries in a low tone.

He was answered much more respectfully than the other had been, but although the two men remained in earnest conversation for some time, it was evident, from the perplexed and disappointed look upon the new-comer's face, that he was not enlightened much regarding the subject under discussion.

What possible interest could those two men have had in the woman who had met with such a luckless fate the day before? If she had been anything to them, why had they delayed so long in coming to identify her? and if either of them was the proper one to take her away, who was the person who had claimed and removed the body so early that morning?

That the first stranger had been deeply interested in the fate of the dead woman was very evident, or he would not have appeared so agitated and disturbed over the fact that some one else had come and taken her away. The other apparently was more concerned in his interest in her than in the woman herself, since he had followed him so cautiously and dogged his footsteps like an ominous shadow; but what his motive was in seeking to bribe the official to

give him information which the other had failed to obtain, does not now appear.

Whatever his object may have been, he was evidently satisfied with his espionage for the present, for, on leaving the morgue, instead of following in the other's track as before, he turned in a different direction, walking briskly away, and did not slacken his steps until he reached the Army and Navy club-house in St. James Square.

* * * * *

More than a week elapsed after the strange wedding at Ashton Manor, and no tidings of Pearle had been received. The guests had all departed, and the earl, with his saddened family, were left alone to mourn over the sad fate of the bright and beautiful girl who, all her life-long, had been the light and joy of their home.

The earl could not be reconciled to the rash act which seemed likely to ruin her whole life, nor to the scandal which it had created in the social world, thus making his family and proud name most disagreeably conspicuous. He extorted all the particulars of Pearle's flight from Elizabeth, and though he knew she could not suffer from want while she had plenty of money, which, the girl assured him, she had, yet the suspense and uncertainty regarding her fate drove him nearly wild.

Where would she go—where hide her shame and misery? Who would give her sympathy or care if her health or reason should fail beneath this terrible blow to all her hopes? These were some of the questions that haunted him continually, making his days miserable and depriving him of rest at night.

Pearle had begged him not to search for her; but he could not rest, and finally went to London, where he remained several days, making inquiries and searching for

her. He inserted a personal in all the papers, which he thought she could not fail to recognize as coming from him if she should see it, but without avail, and he was at last obliged to return to Ashton Manor, where he could only strive for patience and wait.

Meanwhile poor, stricken Pearle was beset with various adventures and dangers. When she entered the express train on the day of her flight, she sank into the nearest seat, feeling as if it mattered little what became of her. Her mind was bewildered, her heart torn and lacerated with her misery, and had some terrible disaster overtaken her, she would have gone out of existence without a regret.

She drew her vail still closer about her face, and folding her shawl around her shoulders, laid back in her chair, oblivious to all save her desperate desire to fly and hide herself forever from all whom she had ever known, and particularly from the man whom she hated, and who had so fatally deceived and wronged her. She took no notice of her fellow passengers; she had barely sense enough to produce her ticket when the conductor came around to gather the fares from the passengers.

Time was nothing to her—she appeared like one stupefied by some powerful opiate, and yet every sense was keenly alive to her sufferings. She longed for sleep, and quiet, and rest, but none came to her, and her pulses beat like hammers, every stroke making her cringe with pain; and thus the hours sped on—the day that had broken so fair and beautiful began to wane, thick clouds gathered and settled down over the bright earth, as if in mourning for the young life which had been so cruelly wrecked.

Pearle did not even know when the train reached its destination, although she was dimly conscious of some

confusion, and that people were moving about her, and she would have remained there all night had not the guard come to arouse her.

"London, miss," he shouted in her ear.

She started in a frightened way, and put her hands to her head as if the harsh tones had hurt her. Her vail fell aside in the act, revealing her beautiful, wearied, and suffering face, and the rough though kind-hearted guard was touched with pity for her.

"Are you ill? Shall I call a cab for you, miss?" he asked, in softened tones.

But she shook her head wearily, tied her vail over her face again, and taking her satchel, she tottered from the carriage.

She would not take a cab, for she feared if she did so it might afford some clew by which she would be traced, and she wanted to hide from every familiar face—to be lost and forgotten, if that were possible. She resolved to go to some quiet and respectable street and search for lodgings, where she would remain until she could decide upon some plan for the long, dreary future.

She was not long in finding what she sought, and consenting to the landlady's terms, she was shown to a quiet and not unpleasant apartment, where, feeling for the time secure, and removing her hat and outer garments, she threw herself exhausted upon the bed, and gave herself up to the rest she so much needed. Her weary body and overtaxed brain succumbed at last, and she fell into a heavy and dreamless slumber.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SERVICE HUNTING.

When Pearle awoke again it was midnight, and she was astonished to find that she had slept so long. When she first threw herself upon the bed she had only thought to rest a little while from her journey, and then she would break her long fast and retire for the night. She was very faint, but she could get nothing to eat at that hour, so she arose and removed her clothing, and crept into bed again, where she slept until late the next morning, when, upon waking, she found the sun streaming in warm and bright upon the carpet.

Just outside her window there grew a large maple tree, whose leaves were beginning to turn into rich, bright hues, and now glowed in the sunlight with rare beauty and loveliness. Some little birds were twittering and singing among the gorgeous foliage their careless, happy songs, and the air was resonant with their melody. These sights and sounds of beauty, life, and joy turned Pearle heart-sick anew, and she buried her face in the pillow with a wild sob of pain.

"Alone! alone! my life marred and broken almost in the beginning. I cannot bear it," she moaned. "My life was beautiful—it was like a poem or a song until *he* crossed my path; now it is ruined. I shall never know a peaceful moment again as long as I live. *What* shall I do? *How* can I bear it? I will *not* bear it. I am bound with chains worse than those of a galley slave. I was a bright, happy,

and innocent girl only one short month ago; and now—oh, Heaven! it was cruel, *cruel* to wreck my life thus. Why should it have been permitted?" she went on, wildly. "Why must it have been sent upon *me*? Why not upon some other, who knows better how to bear it? What have *I* done to merit it? I have never committed any crime or great sin; I have always lived as well as I knew how; then why am I punished like this? If there is a God, *can* he be just and send such misery as this upon me?"

"Hush!" something seemed to say in reply; and the word came to her so distinct and solemn that a feeling of awe stole over her. "Hush! Who are you that you should judge the Almighty! You 'have never committed sin;' you 'have lived as well as you knew how.' *What* has your life been but one ceaseless round of selfish pleasure? You have never done anything that was in the least degree disagreeable; you have never denied yourself for others—have never borne a cross. No one has ever been benefited by your life; not even the 'cup of cold water' has been given by you to one of earth's weary ones."

"But—but I did not know that I ought; I did not know that that meant *me*," Pearle said, in a startled tone, as if in reply to some audible statement. "I have lived beyond and above all that. I don't know much about sorrow or crosses, or 'earth's weary ones.'"

Again, softly as a breath but startlingly clear and authoritative, came the answer:

"Go out into the highways and hedges, saith One; go visit the poor and needy, the sick and dying; go wipe the falling tear; go comfort the mourning. Out of your abundance no tithe has been given; out of your ample time, no fruitful hours for Him who hath a right to the whole. You have no right to live 'above and beyond it all.' You

are 'guilty of no crime,' and yet withhold the Master's due."

" 'The Master's due!' What is that?" Pearle murmured, the guilty color flushing quickly to her pale face, as she thus argued with her own soul.

"Yourself, your life, your reverent love. You have given to a poor, frail mortal the love that was due your Maker. There is no greater crime against heaven and heaven's God than *idolatry*."

The beautiful head of the sorrowing girl was bowed in confusion—she was speechless. Never in all the past had such a view of her life come up before her. It was as though an angel had spoken to her, reading a record of selfishness, pride, and idolatry, of which she had never dreamed until now; and she bowed, abased, before the truth he uttered, and which, brought thus face to face with, she could but own and recognize.

Though deprived of her parents' guardianship at an early age, she had yet never known a care. She had been tenderly sheltered by an elder brother's love, and no sorrow or trial had ever been allowed to come near her. Thus she had grown to feel that her own happiness, her own ease and pleasure, were the paramount considerations in her life. She had never been led to think that out of her own happiness she ought to contribute to others who were less fortunate—that she, indeed, had no right to "live beyond and above" the sorrows of earth.

She was gentle and amiable, and nearly every one loved her; but what honor was that, when life was like a smooth, clear lake on a perfect summer's day, over which she sailed, leaving scarce a ripple behind—when every wish was gratified, and every care and trial smoothed from her path.

Then there had come this beautiful, absorbing love—how it startled her to think of it now! Yes, she had been guilty of a blind idolatry; she had given all her heart, all the best hopes of her life to Richard Byrnholm, never remembering there were higher, nobler duties that she owed to a greater than he; that out of the fullness and joy of the life which God had given her, He had a right to, and would demand, something in return. Never in her life had she felt so solemn, so humbled, so conscience-stricken, as she did at this moment, lying there so lonely in that strange room, and thus reviewing her bright past.

She had cried out in bitterest rebellion upon awaking to a sense of her misery; now she began to wonder if she did not deserve to lose her bright hopes, for having so long neglected and forgotten the Giver of all her former joy.

“Can it be that this thing has been sent upon me to arouse me from a fatal lethargy?” she asked herself, a solemn light in her large gray eyes. “Was it needful that I should be thus warned that this life is not all there is—that there is a future to be prepared for? Perhaps. If I had continued to have everything my own way, seeking my own selfish pleasure, loving more and more, would I ever have thought of all this? and, if not, what would have been the result? What *will* be the result *now*?”

She shivered, moaning with pain for the lost past, with regret for neglected duties, and dread for what she feared the lonely future would be. Then her mind involuntarily went back to that sad day when Lady Radcliffe—her gentle mother—lay dying, and she seemed to hear again the words she had said to her then:

“My Pearle—I called you so, darling, because you seemed so fair and pure as a baby; because to me you were like some spotless pearl plucked from one of heaven’s

gates—let your life be like that jewel, pure, spotless. Do not neglect the ‘pearl of great price;’ do not forget that you are not your own, that you have been ‘bought with a great price,’ and let me find you in heaven at last, as pure and stainless as when God gave you to me.”

She was only a child then, scarce seven years old, but she remembered the yearning, anxious look in her dying mother’s eyes, the tender pathos of her failing voice, and the clinging clasp of her hand, as well as if it had been but yesterday; and to-day those words came to her with peculiar significance and solemnity. But her rebellious heart would not be conquered in a moment, and again and again she cried out :

“I cannot bear it; it is not right. I will not bear it.”

Hour after hour she fought this mighty battle with herself. She arose and dressed, and walked the floor with quick, impatient tread, trying to still the voice of conscience, groping blindly for some relief for her misery, until she grew faint and exhausted, and began to realize that she must satisfy the demands of nature or her strength would utterly fail her.

She had eaten nothing since early the day before; and though the very thought of food was loathsome to her, yet she knew she must have it.

She rang her bell, and ordered the servant who answered it to obtain her a good, wholesome meal at the nearest coffee-house, and bring it to her room.

It was brought, and she forced herself to eat, then threw herself again upon the bed, hoping that sleep would once more wrap her newly-awakened conscience and senses in forgetfulness.

But the drowsy god would not come at her call. She

tossed restlessly from side to side, her head aching, her heart breaking, and life seeming too wretched to live.

"There is no peace for me any more. I have dreamed a bright, beautiful dream. I have been cruelly awakened, and now only darkness and misery remain for me. I cannot bear it."

That was continually her cry. She would battle with her feelings for hours, arguing with her conscience and striving to defend herself against its accusings; but she always came back to that one assertion, "I cannot bear it."

Thus the days went by, and nearly two weeks passed. She had scarce been out of her room, having ordered all her meals served there.

But this state of things could not continue long. She grew poor and weak; her hands seemed almost transparent, her eyes sunken and lusterless.

"Oh, if I could but die and be at peace!" she moaned, one morning, after awaking from a troubled and unrefreshing sleep.

Then again, as once before, she was startled by that inward voice:

"You are not fit to die. There is no peace for the rebellious."

"Not fit to die—no peace for the rebellious!" she repeated, despairingly. "Where is peace to be found but in the grave; how, then, can I find it?"

"By submission to the will of One who does not willingly afflict His children," came the voiceless reply.

"Submission! Can I submit? Can I bow humbly beneath the stroke that has cut me off from every living being whom I love? I have lost hope, happiness, friends, and home; only loneliness and obscurity remain to me for the rest of my life. Can I own my sentence just? Can

I kiss the hand that smites me? Can I, Pearle Radcliffe, who have never been crossed in all my life until now, bend my proud will, and humbly declare it is well?"

All her haughty spirit arose in arms against anything so foreign to her nature.

"Those that walk in pride He is able to abase."

How strange that all these words of Holy Writ should come to her! She could not have told where a single passage was to be found, yet they were as distinct, and accusing, and forcible as if they had been uttered by an audible voice.

It drove her desperate; she could not bear this; she must have some relief.

"Where can I go? What shall I do? What is there on earth that can ease my pain and give me peace?"

Like the whisper of some angelic messenger, she seemed to hear:

"Go, *work* in my vineyard. Deny thyself; take up thy cross; *use* the talents God has given to your keeping for the good of others; and *whatsoever* you shall do in His name for the least of His little ones, it shall be the same as done to Him, and 'peace' shall be unto you."

"That means that I must forget self, putting aside all my willfulness, all my repinings, and minister unto others. It means that I must forget my own comfort and pleasure, I must forget my pain; I must forget that such a person as Pearle Radcliffe exists, except in so far as that she must be submissive, obedient, and do her duty. *Can I?*"

The time had come when this vital question between Pearle Radcliffe's soul and God must be decided for all time and for eternity.

It was no light thing to do—no trivial matter for the haughty, proud-spirited girl to yield everything, and sub-

mit to be led like a little child whithersoever He would, even though it might be into still deeper waters.

For a long time she sat silent, almost motionless, thinking, arguing, struggling with the mighty inward force that was moving her as she had never been moved before. Her beautiful face was sad, wan, and haggard; for the last week, with its mental conflict, had told hard upon her. Gradually a resolute look stole into her expressive gray eyes; her lovely mouth settled into lines of decision and firmness.

"I will do it," she murmured at last. "I have lived all my life for myself and my own selfish pleasure; henceforth I will live for others and the good I can do, whether it bringeth peace or not. Henceforth I will live for *thee* and *thine*."

She lifted her face heavenward as she spoke, then her full heart found relief in a burst of healthful weeping; while, sinking upon her knees, she sobbed out her penitence for a useless past, and her desires for a nobler and better future.

When she arose she was calm and self-possessed once more, a peaceful light gleamed from her eyes, the rigid lines about her mouth were relaxed, and her whole face shone with a new purpose and a new hope.

Hitherto Pearle had been one of the clinging kind—one to be cared for, loved, and petted, although she could be independent enough regarding her own rights and privileges. Still, she had never relied upon herself; she had depended upon others for her amusement and pleasure, without considering that she also had duties—that she, too, owed something to those around her.

Now her latent character, her reserve force, was beginning to develop beneath this fearful blow, which had laid

her prostrate in the dust, as it were, and which had ground to atoms the crust of pride and selfishness that had hitherto enveloped her like an impenetrable shell. She now saw herself as she was, and realized for the first time the responsibility that rests upon every living soul.

She had been created an immortal being, with unlimited capabilities and powers, not to work out her own greatness or distinction, but to fill some sphere of usefulness, and to improve her talents for the glory of her Creator. She realized that she had no right to live within the narrow, limited, though charmed circle which her fastidious tastes had craved and delighted in, with no thought beyond the present moment's enjoyment, or of the great future which all must, sooner or later, enter upon.

But for this trial, this blighting of her fondest hopes, she might have lived all her life and never have known of what stuff she was made—never known what depths there were to her nature, nor the sublime heights to which she was capable of rising. She would, instead, have gone on in the same useless, pleasure-loving, frivolous way, and ruined all the sweetness and blessedness which she afterward attained by ministering, out of the abundance of her rich nature, to some of Christ's "little ones," who otherwise would have gone hungering and starving to the end.

Adversity and sorrow often bring out the strong points of one's character, as the rough and laborious exercise of the blacksmith develops the muscles and sinews, which, under other conditions, would have been comparatively strengthless.

Pearle's first business, after fighting this battle and winning the victory, was to care for her failing and neglected body. This she did so resolutely, that only a few days elapsed before she began to recuperate rapidly.

She then procured a copy of all the daily papers, which she perused with eager interest in search of work to do. She knew that she must fill every hour with something to drive her own sorrow from her mind, if she would follow up the conquest she had begun. Almost the first thing that met her eyes in the papers was this somewhat peculiar advertisement :

LOST!—A “Pearle” of great value. Return at once to A. R. The possessor will understand.

She knew that she was the “Pearle” referred to, for it was spelled as she had always written her name, and not like the jewel. She knew, too, that those initials “A. R.” stood for Allstone Radcliffe.

A wave of bright color rushed into her face for a moment and then receded, leaving it distorted with anguish, while tears of sorrowful yearning filled her sad, gray eyes, as she realized how anxious her fond brother must be on her account, and how he longed for her to come back to the shelter of his love and care.

But she had determined upon her future course, and nothing could make her swerve from it now. She must hide, at least for a while, from the world before which she had disgraced herself and her family. She would not do violence to every feeling of her nature by living a lie as the wife of the man whom she despised ; and she could not mingle again with the world, where she had once reigned a queen, as a divorced wife.

No ; since she could not have the happiness she once hoped for, since she had rashly ruined her own life, she would strive to derive something of comfort by ministering to others, who, perhaps, might suffer as she had suffered.

She turned resolutely away from that advertisement and began reading the “wants,” making a note of several as

she went along, when a difficulty suddenly presented itself to her mind.

"I can never obtain a situation in a respectable family without a recommendation or reference of some kind," she said, thoughtfully, and with a troubled face. All at once her eyes brightened. "I wonder if it would be *right* for me to do it?" she continued, as if considering some doubtful question. "I think I am competent to teach what I thoroughly know. I have had the very best education that good masters and a love of study could give me; my accent is very pure both in French and German, and I excel in music. Yes, I believe I have a right to my *own* recommendation; I will do it."

She sat down to her table and wrote a good, sensible recommendation for a young woman named Margaret Melfert—Melfert had been her mother's name before her marriage—and signed it "M. Agnes Radcliffe, of Ashton Manor." She was a hundred miles from Ashton Manor; she had but few acquaintances in London, and these she determined to avoid most persistently.

Armed with this reference, which, secure in her own ability to perform what she undertook, she considered it no wrong to use, she set forth upon the wearisome task of service hunting.

The first place of which she had made a note was at the West End, in the most fashionable locality of the city. The house was imposing and aristocratic in appearance, and its interior, as Pearle entered, gave her some idea of the wealth of its inmates and their luxurious manner of living.

The lady and mistress of all this elegance, who came to see her in the library, was very pleasant and kind in her

manner, and the young girl thought she should like to succeed in her mission here.

But madam's mind was made up for a refusal of her services the instant she saw Pearle. She was too pretty, too cultivated, too polished in her manner; for madam had sons of an age to appreciate such things more than their own proud position in the world, and she knew that it would be dangerous in the extreme to admit this fascinating young person into her house as a governess, notwithstanding Pearle's unassuming ways, and the sad story of some sorrow which she could not fail to read in her eyes.

She listened courteously while Pearle made her application, and read her reference with evident satisfaction, then graciously told her that she was exceedingly sorry to disappoint her, but she had already decided in favor of some one else.

She had made a mental reservation, while talking with Pearle, in favor of the first ill-favored but competent person who should apply for the situation.

Pearle was disappointed, but not disheartened, and courageously plodded on her weary errand for hours. Some places no amount of money would have induced her to accept, and upon applying for others, as in the first instance, her face and grace were her doom.

Women with susceptible sons, or with homely daughters, were jealous of her beauty, and would not employ her; indeed, they appeared as if they considered it a personal insult for a beautiful girl to presume to seek an entrance into their family.

At last, nearly wearied out with her fruitless search, Pearle, as a final resort that day, turned to an advertisement which had not been at all attractive to her, but which

she had made a note of in case every other should fail her, as they had done :

WANTED.—A young person of winning appearance, to interest and amuse an invalid child.

“I do not like it—the constant slavery of the care of a fretful, peevish child ; but it may be the only thing there is for me to do,” she said, as she stood hesitating, after leaving the house where she had made her last application.

She walked slowly on in the direction of the street indicated, a troubled, undecided expression on her weary face.

“I do not want it,” she said at last, and stopping short. “I will go back to my lodging and rest, and perhaps something more attractive may appear in the morning papers.”

With this resolve, she turned to retrace her steps. As she did so, she saw a face and figure on the opposite side of the street that made her heart sink like lead in her bosom. The face was turned toward her, the eyes were fastened upon her with an eager, questioning look, that seemed to penetrate even the thick folds of her veil. Although terribly frightened and dismayed by this sudden apparition, yet Pearle did not lose her self-possession.

“I’m afraid he knows me,” she thought, her nerves tingling as with electricity ; “but it will not do for me to appear to notice it.”

She even stopped a moment before a stationer’s window, as if to examine something displayed there, although she knew that that figure was then in the act of crossing the street.

The store was a large one, and ran clear back and opened upon another street at the further end. After considering what it was best for her to do, Pearle, apparently

having seen something she wanted, deliberately entered the shop.

That figure following came and stood at the same window where she had been but a moment before, and she could actually feel the keen glance of those fierce eyes, even though her back was turned in that direction.

She made some trifling purchase, giving the exact amount named, so as not to be obliged to wait for change—she could not stand there long beneath that espionage—then, with a light, quick tread, she passed out of the other door of the store into the opposite street. Once in the street, fear lent speed to her steps, and she almost flew over the ground.

She turned several corners, glancing furtively back as she did so; but seeing no one following, she took courage, and at last gained the street where she had taken lodgings, a feeling of security beginning to take the place of her fright.

The house was reached, the door opened almost immediately to her ring, the last flutter of her garments was upon the point of disappearing within, when a man, panting and almost breathless, turned a corner just above.

On and on he came, with rapid strides, paused an instant before the door through which Pearle had disappeared, then, with a sardonic grin on his face, passed on, muttering, in low, fierce tones:

“I’m not *quite* sure, but I shall satisfy myself ere long.”

That man was Adison Cheetham, and he was reasonably sure that he had at last tracked his prey to her hiding-place.

CHAPTER XIX.

PEARLE'S CHARGE.

Pearle, upon gaining her own room, felt secure once more. She was confident that she had outwitted her pursuer, for, on looking from the window, she could see nothing of him. She was weary, and, for the first time since leaving home, felt really hungry. After eating a hearty supper she retired, and slept soundly and healthfully all night long.

She did not awake very early the next morning, and upon peeping through the curtains to see what the day promised to be, she was dismayed beyond measure to see a well-known figure pacing back and forth before the house on the opposite side of the street, and furtively glancing every now and then up at her window.

She realized at once that Adison Cheetham had tracked her to her hiding-place, and was only awaiting some signs of life about the house to pounce down upon her. She dressed herself with all possible haste, deciding upon her plan of action in the meantime.

She packed all her small possessions into her traveling bag, counted out the price of her lodgings and laid it upon the table, leaving an extra crown, for the landlady had been kind to her in many little ways.

She then put on her hat, and tied her thick veil closely over her face, when, glancing again into the street, she saw Adison Cheetham in the act of crossing, and knew she had not a moment to lose.

She turned her back upon the cozy little room that had really grown quite home-like to her, and glided down the stairs into the front hall, just as a loud peal of the bell echoed through it. She trembled with nervousness as she realized that only a single door separated her from her enemy, but her resolution to outwit him never for a moment wavered.

Mrs. Mullens, the landlady, had not yet risen, and there was no one but Biddy, the cook, to answer the bell.

Pearle had taken this fact into consideration, and as there was a front and a back staircase leading down to the basement, she stood at the head of the front stairs until she heard Biddy ascending the back ones, when she passed swiftly and noiselessly down into the kitchen, out into the little back yard, through a small gate that had been cut in the fence which separated it from another yard, and so came out upon another street, before Biddy had succeeded in unfastening the hall door, or Adison Cheetham had made his first inquiry regarding his fugitive wife.

"Is your mistress within?" was his first query to the girl.

"Shure, sir, an' she'd not be afther bein' anywhere else at this time iv the mornin'," she answered, in her rich brogue.

"Can I see her?"

"I s'pose yez can if yez is willin' to wait for her to get up; but"—with a knowing quirk of her small, twinkling eyes—"yez'll not be *plazed* wid her if ye calls her before her temper-nap is out."

Biddy had learned to designate her mistress' last morning sleep as her "temper-nap," since she had learned, to her sorrow, that by disturbing her before she was ready to

rise, the natural sweetness (?) of her disposition was destroyed for the day.

"Ah!" Mr. Cheetham returned, thoughtfully; then slipping a piece of silver into the girl's hand, he continued: "Perhaps that will not be necessary; maybe you can tell me what I wish to know. You have a young lady lodging here, I believe?"

"Yis, yer honor; a half a dozen iv them," Biddy returned, viewing the silver with a loving yet half-suspicious glance.

"The one I refer to occupies the front room second floor. She wears, when on the street, a dark-brown suit, a dark straw hat, and a thick veil to match her dress tied over her face."

"Shure, sir, is it Miss Melfert yez manes?—and a shwate young leddy she be, too, wid her sad eyes and winnin' ways. Yis, yer honor, she lodges here."

"Ahem! yes, Miss Melfert," Adison Cheetham began, a cunning gleam in his eyes at having discovered the assumed name that Pearle had given. "Well, I am a particular friend to that young lady. Will you tell her that a gentleman would like to see her?"

"What name, sir, if ye plaze?"

"Never mind the name, my good girl; she will know me when she sees me," he returned.

"Yez be a friend to the young leddy—um! but be *she* a friend to yersel'?" Biddy demanded, dryly.

The sight of his money had, for a moment, won her heart; but Pearle, with her gentle ways, kind words, and little gifts, had made a true friend of the rough Irish girl during the little while she had been in the house. She knew Pearle had lately known some deep sorrow. She did not like the looks of this strange man, notwithstand-

ing his gift of money—she did not like his refusing to give his name; and remembering how close the young girl had kept herself, she instinctively feared that this stranger might not be such a “particular friend,” after all.

Adison Cheetham smiled at the girl's cunning.

“You can judge as to that matter when I tell you that I expect to spend my life with the young lady,” he said, confidently, and dropping another piece of money into her hand—a yellow one this time.

Biddy was not proof against such blandishments as these.

“Lauk! her beau, is it?” she cried, her red face all aglow with appreciation of the romance of the thing. “Iv coorse yez wants to see her, thin. Coom intil the parlor while I shpake to her, though I’m in doubt will she be awake.”

“I think she is. I saw her at the window before I rang,” the wretch said, as he followed Biddy into the parlor.

He had indeed caught a glimpse of Pearle as she peeped between the curtains.

“Arra, thin, maybe she's expectin' yez,” the girl answered, with another appreciative grin.

“I think she is,” he muttered, more to himself than in reply to her, and feeling quite sure that Pearle suspected his vicinity.

He had tracked her at last. He had not ceased to search for her since leaving Ashton Manor, and he was now determined that he would not leave the place without she accompanied him.

His chagrin can better be imagined than described when Biddy returned to the parlor, with a very perplexed coun-

tenance, and made the startling announcement that Pearle had gone, bag and baggage.

The landlady now made her appearance, looking very sleepy, and not exceedingly pleased at having so early a caller.

She uttered an enraged shriek upon being informed of Miss Melfert's departure, and immediately rushed from the room to ascertain for herself the truth of the report. She soon returned, however, in a calmer frame of mind, having found the money which the young girl had left, and which, having counted it and discovered the extra crown, had considerably mollified her ire.

Adison Cheetham plied the woman with numberless questions; but since Pearle had kept her room nearly all the time, holding very little communication with any one beyond the ordering of her meals, there was not much to tell, and the baffled villain finally took his departure, cursing his ill-luck, but vowing that he would find her yet.

Pearle, meanwhile, hardly knew what to do with herself. She dare not traverse the streets, lest in doing so she should encounter the foe she had but just escaped.

It was too early to apply for the situation she had been so loth to seek yesterday, but which now seemed like a haven of refuge, in her loneliness, and friendlessness, and danger.

She finally entered a coffee-house, where there were little stalls partitioned off and curtained, and which had at once attracted her as being a safe resort until she could decide upon some plan for further action. Seeking one of these, she ordered a breakfast which she knew it would take a good while to prepare, and hoped by the time it was ready and eaten, it would do for her to apply for that unattractive

situation, which she had, in her emergency, decided to take if she could get it.

Every step she heard without her hiding-place sent a nervous thrill through her whole frame, and she was constantly glancing out to ascertain who the new-comers might be.

But no one entered whom she knew, and by the time her breakfast was ready she had grown comparatively calm, and ate it with relish.

Looking at her watch when she had completed her meal, she found it was nearly ten o'clock.

"Hyde Park is a long way from here; I cannot walk the distance and carry my bag," she said to herself. "I will call a cab, and then I shall be sure not to encounter any one I do not wish to see."

She rang the bell, paid her bill, and ordered the waiter to send for a cab. He said he would do so, but there was some delay, and it was nearly half-past ten before it arrived.

She glanced nervously around her as she left the coffee-house to enter it; but no one she knew was visible, and, with a sigh of relief, she sank into the seat and drew the curtains close.

When at length the cab stopped before a quietly elegant house at Hyde Park Corner, she alighted, bidding the cabman to wait for her. Hastening up the marble steps, she rang the bell, and stood with trembling heart while awaiting the appearance of a servant.

He came at length—a footman in livery. She stated her errand, and was shown through the magnificent hall into a small reception-room, and left alone while the man went to summon his master.

Ten minutes elapsed—an age they seemed, too, to anx-

ious Pearle—and then the door opened again, admitting a tall, handsome man, of perhaps thirty-three years.

“Miss Melfert, I presume,” he said, bowing gravely, while his eyes sought the card upon which Pearle had delicately traced the name which she had determined should henceforth be hers—Margaret Melfert.

Pearle bowed assent.

“I understand that you have come to apply for the situation advertised in yesterday’s papers,” he continued, studying her fair face, and wondering what cruel necessity had driven this beautiful creature to seek such a position.

“I have come to inquire what the duties of the situation are, and to ascertain if I am fitted for them,” she replied, in her sweet, lady-like tones.

He did not immediately answer her; he was studying her elegant figure—elegant in carriage, if not so much so in form in Elizabeth’s loose-fitting dress—the sad, high-bred face, crowned with its silken, glossy hair, and the small hand so neatly incased in its expensive glove.

Sir Harold Cheswick’s verdict in his own mind regarding the applicant for the vacant situation in his family, was easy to read by his respectful tone, as he answered :

“I fear the duties you refer to may not be of the most congenial character. I have a little daughter, fourteen years of age, who is a confirmed invalid. She was always well until about four years ago, when she was attacked with a disease of the spine, which has crippled her for life. She is comparatively comfortable just now as to her general health, although not able to endure much excitement or fatigue. She is very capricious and exacting; she will not be governed, will not study, is very miserable and unhappy on account of her deformity, and makes every one unhappy around her. I have not known what to do with

her during the last three months; and, as a last resort, I advertised, as you have seen, hoping that some one might be found who would be willing to devote herself to the child's amusement for a handsome remuneration. Money will be no object, if the right person can be obtained," the gentleman concluded, with a heavy sigh, as if he doubted that any one competent would be willing to assume such a responsibility.

Pearle's eyes had grown tender with pity as she listened to the sad story of this crippled child.

"Has your little girl's education ever been attended to?" she asked, thoughtfully.

"Oh, yes; she was very forward and bright for her age before her sickness. She reads readily and writes nicely."

"Is she fond of music?"

"Passionately; it is the only thing that she really seems to enjoy. Are you musical in your tastes?"

"Yes, sir; and I love children. I think I would like to undertake the charge of your little daughter for a while, if you are favorably disposed toward my application, and see if I cannot make the time pass agreeably, and perhaps profitably, to her," Pearle said, feeling strangely interested in the forlorn little one.

Sir Harold's face involuntarily lighted at the sound of her gentle, sympathetic tone.

"I cannot fail to be otherwise than favorably disposed," he said, quickly, with a genial smile; and Pearle was surprised that he did not demand the ever necessary references. "Would you like to see Miss Grace?" he asked, after a moment of thought. "I suppose it will have to be as she decides about your remaining."

Pearle felt her heart sink again at these words. If her future was to be governed by a capricious child, she feared

the worst, yet she signified her desire to see this very peculiar young lady; and, rising, Sir Harold led the way from the room, up the broad, richly-carpeted stairs, to a large south room looking out upon the busy street.

It was a pleasant, sunny apartment, and furnished most luxuriously with everything the most exacting nature could desire.

In a reclining-chair of crimson velvet there lay an elfish-looking child. Her skin was of chalk-like whiteness, her eyes as black as a raven's wing, her tangled hair of the same hue, while she did not look nearly as old as she really was. She was small and much emaciated, while the anxious expression upon her young face told of much suffering.

She looked up eagerly as the door opened, but frowned angrily when she saw her father.

"I thought you had gone to get me some grapes, papa," she said, in a whining, fretful tone.

"I hope I have brought you something far better, though you shall have the grapes also very soon," Sir Harold said, pleasantly; then added: "I have invited a young lady to come up and see you. Miss Melfert, this is my little daughter."

Pearle went to the child's side and greeted her kindly, an expression of such genuine sympathy on her lovely face that the frown upon her brow instantly disappeared.

"You are very good to come and see me," she said, shyly; "are you one of papa's friends?"

Pearle smiled, and a dash of color shot into her cheeks.

"No, Miss Grace; I am only here to inquire about an advertisement regarding a companion for you."

"Oh! Are you good-natured?" Grace demanded, with a keen glance into the expressive gray eyes looking so

kindly down upon her. Pearle laughed a low, musical laugh at this personal question. "Because if you aren't," the child went on, before she could reply, "I don't want you; everybody is cross to me."

Sir Harold sighed. He feared this gentle, beautiful young lady, in whose favor he had been at once prepossessed, would be repulsed by this ungracious reception. Too well he knew the trials to which she would be subjected if she remained with this spoiled child—spoiled by over-indulgence during her sickness—a mistaken kindness, which he realized when it was too late to remedy his error.

"I do not think it would be wise for me to say very much about my good points, Miss Grace; but I do not think I could be very ill-natured to a little girl who was suffering," she returned, sweetly.

The black eyes went sharply up to Pearle's face again, to see if she was speaking with sincerity. She was evidently satisfied with her scrutiny, for her little pinched face took on a gentler expression than it had yet worn.

"Can you play and sing?" she asked, with a glance at the open piano, which was a marvel of beauty and richness.

"Yes; would you like to hear me?" Pearle asked, drawing off her gloves preparatory to gratifying the child.

She nodded, an eager, expectant look creeping into her eyes.

Miss Melfert arose and went to the piano, struck a few rich chords, and then played something that had a cheerful, airy sound, filling the room with melody.

It was a pleasure just to sit and watch her movements, she was so graceful, while her white hands flying over the

key-board were perfectly bewitching—at least, so thought Sir Harold, as he sat and watched her.

"Sing," commanded the invalid, with a deep-drawn breath, as she ceased playing; and Pearle sang two or three simple ballads in her rich, clear voice.

There was no other sound in that room until the last note died away; then a passionate sob smote her ear, and turning, she saw that little tangled head bowed upon the wasted hand, and knew that the child's soul had been touched.

"There must be some gentleness in the little heart," she thought, as she arose and went again to her side, her sympathies more and more awakened for the peculiar being.

"I have tired you," she said, gently, while her white hand wandered caressingly over the tangled elfin locks.

"No, no no; but it was so beautiful I could not help it," she sobbed; then, with an impulse as sudden as it was strange, she lifted her head, caught Pearle's hand, and kissed it.

"Stay, will you?" she asked, clinging to it. "Do you think you could bear to stay with *me*?"

"Yes, dear, if you think you will be happy with me," Pearle said, softly.

"I will try; indeed I will, Miss Melfert," she said, earnestly. "I will try to be good, but my back aches so that I am dreadful naughty sometimes; but if you'll stay, I *will* try not to fret you."

Sir Harold looked on and listened in astonishment. This was a new phase of his daughter's character. Hitherto she had been perfectly unmanageable; nothing had pleased her, and the whole household were often at their wits' end to know how to get along with her.

But the mere presence of this young girl seemed to have a softening influence upon her, and during all her sickness she had never spoken so gently or clung to any one as she did now to Pearle.

Miss Melfert raised her eyes inquiringly to Sir Harold after Miss Grace's last words.

"Could you be persuaded to undertake the charge?" he asked, understanding her.

"Yes, if you can trust her with me," she said, simply, whereupon the sick girl looked up with a happier face than she had worn for years.

"When would it be convenient for you to come?" the baronet then asked.

"I could remain now, if it would be agreeable," she replied, with a slight flush, and thinking he little knew how she dreaded going forth into the street again.

"How delightful that would be!" cried Grace, eagerly.

"It would be exceedingly agreeable," Sir Harold replied, with a look of intense relief and satisfaction upon his handsome face.

"But your baggage—you will need that. However, I can send for it at any time," he added, after a moment of thought.

"I was about changing my lodging as I came hither, and I have my traveling satchel with me, which is all the baggage I have at present in the city," Pearle explained.

"And you will stay now—now?" exclaimed the delighted child.

"Yes, dear; now, if you wish."

"I do—I do! Oh, papa, I *will* be good; I will not tease her," she said, turning her bright face to him.

"That is my dear child; now give me a kiss, my pet,

as I have a few more arrangements to make with Miss Melfert, and you must excuse her for a little while."

He took her tenderly in his arms and kissed her, for he loved her fondly, notwithstanding her faults; then rising, he opened the door and held it for Pearle to pass out, as courteously as if she had been a duchess.

CHAPTER XX.

WINNING A VICTORY.

Sir Harold went out and paid and dismissed the cabman upon descending from his daughter's room, and then led Pearle once more into the reception-room, to settle the question of salary, etc.

"I cannot tell you how gratified I am with the manner in which you have been received by Grace," he said, heartily. "She is a very nervous, peculiar child, and if you succeed in winning her to something like cheerfulness and content, I cannot feel too grateful to you. I know that you will be often severely tried; but whatever remuneration you may consider adequate, I shall feel that it is well earned."

Pearle looked up at him with some surprise. This was not the way she supposed terms were usually made with governesses or companions.

"I shall leave that matter entirely with you for the present," she said. "I supposed"—she hesitated, flushing a trifle, and he waited courteously for her to go on—"I supposed that madam would be consulted before anything was permanently settled."

She had wondered that Sir Harold's wife had not been called in to help decide so vital a question, and she had wondered, too, not to hear Grace refer in any way to her mamma.

Sir Harold's face grew crimson, then pale, as she thus referred to his wife.

"My little daughter's mother died more than three years ago," he returned, in low, suppressed tones, and with a pained look in his eyes.

"Pardon me," Pearle murmured, regretting that she should have thus reminded him of so great a sorrow, and feeling even more tenderly toward the motherless girl up stairs.

Then a startled blush mounted to her forehead. Madam dead! Who, then, was at the head of this luxurious establishment—who presided over this luxurious home? Surely there ought to be some one competent and responsible, or it would not be proper for her to remain an inmate of the house. It would be very awkward, very questionable for her to do so; and yet, in her momentary confusion, she could not force herself to question him regarding the matter.

He must have read something of this in her troubled glance at him, for he said, quietly, though re-assuringly:

"My family consists simply of myself, my daughter, and a maiden aunt, who, with the assistance of the house-keeper, directs all household matters. I fear it will be very dull for you here, Miss Melfert, but we will try and make it as pleasant as possible, if you will consent to remain for a while."

His tone was wistful; he wished this lovely woman to stay; he felt that her influence must be beneficial to his

invalid child, and he was drawn toward her irresistibly himself.

"I will remain for the present," Pearle answered, greatly relieved. "I shall be quite content, I hope, as I prefer to be quiet, and I trust that Miss Grace and I shall get on very peaceably together."

"I feel sure of it," Sir Harold responded, with a gratified smile; "but," he added, in a somewhat dubious tone, "I shall not presume to engage you for any length of time, knowing something of the trials to which you may be subjected; but if thirty pounds a quarter will be sufficient for your needs, I shall deem myself fortunate to secure your services for that amount and for that period, hoping, when it shall have expired, to prevail upon you to remain longer. However, you are to feel perfectly free to sever the connection at any time. I would not bind you one hour longer than it would be pleasant for you to stay."

"The compensation will be ample, thank you," Pearle said, much surprised at the liberal sum he had named; and then she signified her desire to go at once to her charge.

Sir Harold rang the bell, and commanded the servant who appeared to show Miss Melfert to the southwest suite, which were for the present to be exclusively her rooms. He held the door open for her to pass out, saying, cordially, as he did so:

"Pray make yourself perfectly at home, Miss Melfert; call upon the servants for anything you wish, and command me at any time."

Pearle bowed her thanks, and wondered to find herself—a poor, friendless, exiled girl, and, in the eyes of Sir

Harold, naught but a simple governess—so courteously and considerately treated.

The southwest suite proved to be luxurious apartments, just in the rear of Miss Grace's rooms, and furnished with every elegance to which she had all her life been accustomed at Ashton Manor.

And now a strange, new life opened to her. She who had always been served, petted, and caressed, was now to serve and be subject to the caprices of a spoiled and arrogant child.

It was to be a life that demanded unlimited patience and self-denial upon her part, and it proved in many respects a wearisome life; but it brought into action powers which Pearle never dreamed she possessed, making her grow strong and self-reliant, and fitting her for the strange and varied future which lay before her.

She did not repine that her lot had been cast in with this fretful, selfish, peevish child. She assumed her duties with a cheerful countenance, a brave, resolute heart, and an unwavering trust in the strong hand on which she was beginning to lean with such loving confidence.

Her battles with self had all been fought during those two despairing weeks that she had spent in her lodgings, when death seemed preferable to life; she had put behind her all vain repinings, and resolved to conquer her selfish, absorbing grief. The keen bitterness, the despairing anguish were past, and she was growing strong with a strength which surprised while it helped her, and a peace that was as wonderful as it was grateful took possession of her bruised heart, and sustained her in every duty.

The proud, beautiful Pearle Radcliffe had grown tenfold more lovely, with a new, tender dignity, which this surrender of her haughty self had engendered. The light

which shone from her wonderful gray eyes was steady and calm with a peace which seemed to draw every one toward her, and to cause involuntary reverence for the sweetly expanding spirit beneath. The gayety and careless impulse that had previously characterized her had now given place to a charming gentleness and grace that was irresistible, and one look into her grave, thoughtful, but wondrously winning face told of a true and tender woman into full stature rapidly developing.

I do not say that she knew no sad moments—that the bright past did not often rise, like some evil phantom, to taunt her with what she had lost, and point with mocking scorn to the fetters she believed must always bind her. It was often thus, and for the moment the deep waters would roll over her, threatening to envelope and drag her again into the regions of despair. But the bruised heart had learned whither to turn for peace, and her anguished cry for help never failed to bring the comforter to her aid.

* * * * *

Grace Cheswick had never been thwarted in a single whim or wish since she was first attacked with the terrible illness which made her a cripple for life. She had been a merry, happy, though quick-tempered child previous; but suffering and the mistaken kindness which had ministered to and fostered every sickly fancy, had completely changed her nature. She was passionate, sullen, fretful, and ill-natured in the extreme. Even the slightest hesitation on the part of her father, the nurse, or a servant to gratify her demands, would throw her into a frenzy that was frightful to witness.

Pearle was a grieved and shocked observer to a paroxysm of this kind the morning following her installation as companion to the willful little lady. The nurse had assisted

her to rise and dress, and having arranged her comfortably in her luxurious chair, brought her her medicine to take before she should eat the tempting breakfast which a servant had just spread upon the table at her side. A dish of fruit was also upon the table—oranges, grapes, bananas, lemons, dates, and figs.

Miss Grace obstinately refused to take her medicine, and demanded a lemon and a fig instead. The nurse coaxed and reasoned against this—the lemon and fig were not suitable to be eaten upon an empty stomach, and the medicine had been ordered to be taken before breakfast.

Miss Grace declared she would *not* take it—she *would* have the fruit; and throwing up her hands and feet, kicked and screamed furiously, and ended by striking the brimming spoon from the nurse's hand.

Pearle came into the room in the midst of this scene, and a feeling of disgust and repulsion for the moment took possession of her.

"I can never endure this," she said to herself; "I shall never humble myself to that child, allowing her to tyrannize over me like that, or to conquer my better judgment regarding her health. I will begin as I intend to go on."

With a look of firmness and decision on her face, she glided to the side of the enraged child, and quietly rolled the table, with its tempting breakfast and fruit, far beyond her reach, saying as she did so :

"Nurse, I think Miss Grace must be suffering severe pain, to make her scream so. It must be colic, or something of the kind, and she must recover from it before she will be able to eat anything."

Her face was calm and unruffled, her manner gentle, and her eyes pityingly reproachful as they rested on the

infuriated girl; but there was an air of decision about her which plainly said Miss Grace could not touch a morsel of anything until she showed symptoms of recovering from the paroxysm, of whatever nature it might be.

Both nurse and patient regarded her in wonder, and the latter became instantly silent from astonishment. But the little fury was not to be tamed all at once. For a moment her black eyes studied Pearle's fair face with a curious look, as if measuring the strength of this new combatant; then she set up another unearthly howl, crying out:

"I haven't the colic either. Give me that lemon instantly. I will have it, I tell you;" and the kicks and screams were renewed more violently than before.

"Certainly, Miss Grace, it *must* be the colic," Pearle persisted; "and it *must* be very painful, for I once saw a little boy three years old who had it, and his symptoms were exactly the same. Surely no *young lady* of your age could be thrown into such unseemly contortions from any other cause;" and the calm, steady gray eyes met the furious black ones unflinchingly, while the slightest possible curl of scorn was visible about Pearle's lovely lips. The child was quick to see it, and realized, as she had never done before, how ridiculous she was making herself appear.

She had never been dealt with in any such way before. Every one had hitherto sprung to do her bidding upon the least display of temper. No one presumed to cross her, and she had grown into the habit of tyrannizing over the whole household, until every one dreaded to come into her presence.

But here stood this delicate, beautiful stranger, looking down upon her without a ruffle upon her brow, and showing no disposition to yield to her in the least degree, yet

with soft, pitying eyes, that seemed to grieve for—what? her pain or her passion? She could not tell which.

She found herself involuntarily wondering if Miss Melfert really believed that she was suffering from a stomach-ache, and behaving like a child three years old—she, who had suffered torture from that dreadful pain in the back which had crippled her for life, and often, by the exercise of her strong will, had refused to yield to it, until exhausted nature could bear no more.

A feeling of shame began to creep over her, but this same strong will would not allow itself to be thus easily conquered.

“*I am* going to have the lemon,” she asserted, sullenly and defiantly, while her eyes half guiltily sought the coveted fruit. Those clear, beautiful orbs, looking so steadily down upon her, made her feel extremely uncomfortable.

Pearle made no reply, and the nurse stood silently by, waiting to see how the contest would end.

“Miss Melfert, I really have no pain. Do you believe that lemon will hurt me?” Miss Grace asked, in a more quiet tone, after a moment or two of awkward silence.

“My dear, how old did your papa tell me you are?” Pearle asked, without appearing to heed her question.

“Fourteen,” the young girl replied, hesitatingly, and with a conscious blush.

“Yes, fourteen, I think he said. One is almost a young lady when one reaches that age; and I believe, dear, that you are a sensible young lady, and if you will reason calmly a moment, you will see the wisdom of following the directions which the nurse has received from your physician. Do you know what they are?” Pearle asked, kindly.

"Ye-s; take a spoonful of that filthy medicine before eating my breakfast, and then not eat anything after for two hours," Miss Grace returned, with evident reluctance.

"You believe your physician is a wise man, do you not? You do not think he would give you disagreeable things to take if you did not need them, or that he would refuse you anything pleasant to eat if it was good for you?" Pearle asked again.

"N-o; but I want the lemon," Grace answered, with heightened color and downcast eyes.

Pearle smiled as she noticed how her will was gradually yielding.

"Yes, I know you do," she said, gently; "and *I* wanted something very, *very* much a few moments ago."

"And what was that?" the child demanded, with quickly lifted eyes.

"To run and stay away from the whirlwind I found here," Pearle said, very gravely.

"Oh, Miss Melfert, you have but just come—you *won't* go and leave me?" Miss Grace said, in a startled voice.

"That would be neither wise nor kind in me, dear, any more than it is wise and kind in you to do what you must know would surely make you very ill, causing your papa great anxiety, and making a great deal of extra care and labor for nurse, who looks very weary as it is this morning," Pearle returned, with a sympathetic glance at the tired and perplexed woman. "And so we must not forget," she went on, "that in this world we have to put up with some disagreeable things, that good may come."

Grace looked up with a flash of her black eyes.

"Such disagreeable things as what—me or the medicine?" she asked, abruptly, and unconscious of all grammatical errors.

Pearle smiled good-naturedly.

"A little of both, I am afraid I must say," she said.

"No one ever *dared* talk so to me before," began the child, passionately, and with a scarlet face.

"My dear," Pearle said, touching the head caressingly, "there was no malice in my reply, and I must warn you that if you ask me such plain questions, I shall be obliged to 'dare' to give you truthful answers at all times. Now, let us begin our first day auspiciously. I will dip a clean spoon in this wine for you to take the medicine from. I do not believe you really care very much about the bad taste; that will soon pass, you know."

Suiting the action to the words, she passed the spoon to the nurse, who poured a portion from the bottle she still held in her hand, and which Miss Grace swallowed without a word, but with a very curious glance at her new companion.

"This is a very tempting little breakfast," Pearle continued, rolling the table close to the sick girl's chair; "this breast of a partridge looks exceedingly inviting, the cream toast is still steaming, and this dainty mold of calf's-foot jelly is fit for a queen. Shall I pour your chocolate? It has been over the brazier all the time, and is hot; and while you are eating, we will plan what we will do to make the day pass pleasantly."

"If you please," Miss Grace replied, with another furtive glance into her companion's face, as if to ascertain whether she was being coaxed out of her own willfulness to do the bidding of another.

But Miss Melfert was serving her in a gracious, yet matter-of-fact way, that served to allay her suspicions, and she applied herself with zest to her breakfast, and listened

delightedly while Pearle chatted amusingly of many little incidents that had occurred during her own early life.

The nurse stole away at a significant glance from Pearle, and for an hour rested her weary bones undisturbed, after which she descended to the servants' quarters to relate the wonderful conquest that had been achieved over the "fury of the house," and to sound the praises of the new companion.

Miss Grace was easily entertained during the remainder of the morning, and Pearle found her a really bright and intelligent girl, although sadly deficient in education, which, under the circumstances, could not be otherwise.

There seemed to be some irresistible charm about our fair heroine, for the young invalid did not give rein to her temper again during the day, and in the evening, when her gentle companion bade her "good-night," she impulsively wound her arms about her neck, and whispered :

"Thank you, Miss Melfert, for being so patient with me. I hope I have not quite tired you out."

"No, dear ; it will be my pleasure to make the time pass agreeably to you ; and if I can see this brow placid, these eyes gentle, and these lips smiling, I shall feel amply repaid for every effort ;" and Pearle enforced her words with a soft kiss upon the brow, eyes, and the small lips, that trembled the least bit in the world, and then went away to her own rooms.

It had been a hard day, and she was very weary, for it had taken all her tact and patience to keep the capricious child employed and entertained. But she was not "quite tired out," as Grace had expressed it, for she considered that she had won no mean victory, and she believed that, with continued patience and judicious management, her fractious charge might become a loving and lovable girl, a

comfort to her sorrowing father, and a blessing rather than a burden in the household.

Thus already out of her sorrow her life was drawing toward and reaching forth to another, enriching it with something of the hidden beauty that was within her, and that was to make her a ministering angel to one of the "little ones."

CHAPTER XXI.

PEARLE DISMAYED.

Pearle found that she had not overestimated the amount of patience and self-control that would be needed to sustain her in the position she had accepted; for, as the days went by and Miss Grace became more accustomed to her presence, she repeatedly gave way to her apparently ungovernable temper, until the young governess was often heart-sick and disgusted, and yet tenderly sorrowful for the unhappy girl.

"This is but a reproduction of what I myself was in God's sight during my bitter, selfish grief," she said to herself one day when every effort had failed to pacify her charge. "To be sure, I never gave way to such outward acts of violence, but my rebellious and unreasonable heart was just as obnoxious before Heaven as this passionate child is to me. If I can but help the poor little motherless waif, as I have been helped, my sorrow will not have been all in vain;" and, filled with a tender sympathy for her, she patiently labored and waited.

She received every outburst with the same immovable calmness and gentleness; she never betrayed the slightest anxiety or fear of the passion, before which all others yielded, and flew to do her lightest bidding with abject submission.

Pearle, on the contrary, always laid aside her book, or work, or whatever she was employed with, and sat silently regarding her with mild, pitying eyes until the storm had spent itself, when, with some gentle remark, or perhaps an apt quotation, she would show her unseemly behavior to her in such a light that the angry girl would be covered with shame for the time.

Still this was very wearing to Pearle, and she began to fear that she could not long endure such stern self-control as she was obliged to exercise; it was affecting her nerves, causing her to pass sleepless, restless nights, and her sad eyes grew even more sad and hollow than they were when she came to Cheswick House.

Thus three weeks passed, every day seeming more unbearable than the last, when there came a crisis.

Miss Grace awoke one morning more at war with the world and herself than she had apparently ever been before.

Nothing would please her, nothing was too bad for her to do or say. Her language was coarse and abusive, her face the face of a little fury, and every motion bespoke passion and ill-nature.

Pearle bore it all with her usual sweetness until, during one fearfully violent outburst, she arose, and quietly crossing the room, turned a swinging mirror, which was exactly opposite Grace's chair, in such a position that she saw the picture in all its repulsiveness.

The effect was marvelous and instantaneous.

The child sat suddenly erect, making a gesture of disgust, and uttered a low cry as she looked upon her distorted, passion-lined face.

"Do I look like *that*, Miss Melfert?" she asked, after a moment, catching her breath and pointing toward the unlovely picture.

"I am sorry to say that you do," Pearle replied, very gravely and sadly.

"But I am angry now; I don't look so *all* the time, do I?" she asked, trying to smooth the wrinkles from her brow with her thin, trembling hand.

Pearle gave her a grieved glance.

"*When* you are angry, dear, that is the face I have to look upon," she said, gently, but with significant emphasis upon the first word.

The child stared and colored vividly.

"I know what you mean; I am angry most of the time, so of course I always look that way. Ugh! I hate myself," she cried, passionately.

The glass faithfully reproduced every look and gesture, and with a moan of pain the girl buried her face in her handkerchief to shut out the sight.

Pearle changed the position of the mirror, sorry for the pain she had caused, but hoping it might be beneficial; and then going to her side, she said, kindly, but earnestly:

"We do not like to be told unpleasant truths, but it does us good sometimes; and, Grace, every time you give way to your passionate temper, you add one more unlovely line to your face, one more blemish to your character."

"Oh, Miss Melfert!"

"I grieve to pain you, dear, but evil passions uncon-

trolled will mar the loveliest countenance, while a beautiful soul, shining through even a plain face, will make it attractive and lovable."

"I never want to look at my face again as long as I live! Miss Melfert, did you *mean* to make me *hate* myself when you turned that glass?" the child asked, almost angrily.

"Certainly not, Miss Grace; and yet, if we could all see ourselves as we really are more frequently, I think it might help us to grow better."

"See ourselves as we are?" was the bitter retort. "I don't see how you *dare* say such a thing to *me*!" and the ungovernable child was in a fair way to fly in a passion again.

"You would surely not believe me sincere if I should tell you that you were lovely and amiable—flattery is always low and mean; neither would you like me to talk with you as if I considered you incapable of understanding rational conversation, would you?" Pearle asked, quietly.

"No, of course not; but one does not like to be told that she is *ugly*," was the spirited reply.

"If there should come a diseased spot on your hand, which would prove fatal unless removed, would you think your physician either wise or honest to keep the fact from you, and take no measures to save you?"

"N-o."

Miss Grace evidently saw the point of this question, as her reluctant tone indicated.

"Every nature has *spots of evil* in it, so to speak," Pearle went on, gratified to see that the young girl was taking this severe lesson to heart; "and if they are allowed to grow and spread, with no effort to restrain them, our life is

ruined—it is a failure, and there can be no beauty in it. I have noticed how very fond you are of anything that is beautiful—pictures, flowers, and particularly of people who have lovely faces. Now, my little friend, why not try to make *yourself* beautiful, and thus have a source of constant enjoyment?”

“Make myself beautiful! with this ugly, misshapen body, this chalk-like face, hollow cheeks, and sunken eyes?” the girl burst forth with bitter passion.

“Yes, dear—so beautiful that every one will love you.”

“Miss Melfert, you are cruel; you are mocking me. I know how ugly I look, and it has made me hate myself and everybody except my father, and it seems as if everybody must hate and shrink from me. I wish I could die!”

The poor child threw herself back in her chair in a paroxysm of genuine grief.

Pearle, looking back a few weeks, remembered her own bitter sorrow over her blighted life—remembered her agonized moan that she might die—and all her tenderest sympathies were aroused for this stricken little one, whose burden was as real and heavy to bear as her own had been.

Kneeling down beside her, she drew the dusky head upon her bosom, and folded her arms around the crippled form with all the tenderness of a mother.

“Hush!” she said, softly, and almost involuntarily the little weeper checked her sobs. Those clinging arms, that tender tone, the gently heaving bosom that pillowed her head, were so comforting to the suffering child, that from that moment she loved Pearle as she had never loved any one before, save her father. “Hush!” she repeated; “you overestimate your misfortune. Time will do much,

very much for you. Use all the means at your command to regain your health, and these hollow cheeks will fill out, these emaciated hands and limbs will grow round and plump. You have lovely hair, your eyes are bright and intelligent—make the *most* of what you have, dear; cultivate your mind; store it with useful knowledge; seek to acquire a gentle, affable manner; train your lips to smile, and to frame pleasant, agreeable words—thus you will make your *inner self* beautiful, and if that is lovely it *cannot help* shining through and attracting others.”

“Oh, Miss Melfert, *do* you believe it?” the child said, looking up with eager, grateful eyes. “Nobody ever told me anything half so comforting before. I wish—I *wish* I could do all that you say, but——”

“Did you ever read Miss Mulock’s story of ‘A Noble Life?’” Pearle asked, drawing the slight form closer to her, a thrill of hope and love making her heart beat more quickly.

“No.”

“I will get it and read it to you. It may help you over that formidable ‘but.’ There are many things that *seem* impossible to us, which we can do if we try in the right way,” Pearle answered, with a fond smile upon the little earnest face upturned to hers.

“I wish you would read the story to me; and—how good you are to me, Miss Melfert! I don’t believe there are any ‘spots’ on your soul; you are lovely through and through,” the child said, as she impulsively threw her arms around Pearle’s neck and kissed her soft cheek.

She sighed involuntarily, and a mist gathered in her eyes. Too well she remembered the shadow of evil that had chased the brightness from her life; and yet, kneeling there with that impulsive and repentant child in her

arms, a sense of content stole over her such as she had never experienced before.

"My cloud is even now gathering a silvery fringe," she thought. "Perhaps behind it there may be light and peace if I—'*wait on Him*' with patience and submission."

The next three days were spent in reading that charming and wholesome tale—"A Noble Life"—and Pearle could see that it made a deep impression upon her charge. She grew grave, and thoughtful, and more gentle. She sobbed in sympathy over the sad life of the grand hero, and held her breath while she listened to his heart struggles, and followed him through the victories he won over self and the world.

When the story was finished, she looked up at Pearle with shining eyes and quivering lips.

"Oh, Miss Melfert, he was grand, *beautiful*; I love him. Will you help *me* to grow like him?" she said, all her better impulses aroused to action.

For answer Pearle bent and kissed the trembling lips tenderly.

From that time there was a radical change in her charge. She begged that she might have regular lessons assigned her, and these she learned with a readiness and eagerness that was surprising. She strove to be gentle and patient, she was kinder to the nurse and servants, and the days passed more quickly than ever before.

But the conquest was not an easy one; there were many struggles—many days when the old habits threatened to regain the ascendancy; but the strong will had been bent in the right direction. She strove hard to win, and Pearle, full of tenderest sympathy, was always gentle and patient, giving such efficient help and advice that the young girl

clung to her with fondest affection, and her influence over her was almost measureless.

Thus six months went by, and at the end of that time one would scarcely have recognized the peevish, fretful, ill-natured child that Pearle had found when she first came to Cheswick House.

She was led to see the wisdom of forming regular habits; she ate at stated hours; she took moderate exercise, and no longer murmured at the distasteful remedies prescribed by her physician, and the result was an almost immediate change for the better in her health. A more healthful tint brightened her face, her cheeks began to fill out, and something of strength and vigor returned to her body.

Instead of mourning and fretting away the day, her time was now nearly all occupied; when her lessons were over, her little fingers were busy with drawing materials, or some bewitching fancy work which Pearle's own hands had begun to fashion, hoping thus to beguile the time which otherwise would have lagged heavily.

To Sir Harold this change seemed almost marvelous. Often upon entering his stately mansion his heart would bound as he caught the sound of a merry laugh, or the clear, sweet tones of a young voice singing some simple song to Miss Melfert's accompaniment, and involuntarily he would turn and mount the grand staircase and seek his daughter's room, which once he could not enter without a feeling of dread and aversion.

"What have you been doing to my pet, Miss Melfert, to make her so bright and cheery?" he asked one day, as he opened the door upon them in the midst of a merry jest.

Grace looked up with sparkling eyes and a happy face.

"She is a dear, delightful fairy, papa, and has transformed me so that I have almost forgotten who I am," she said, laughing.

"I believe you," he returned, giving the "delightful fairy" an admiring glance that brought a richer tint to her cheeks. "My darling is a very different being from what she was a few months ago."

"Please bestow your praise where it is most deserved; Miss Grace has had some hard battles to fight," Pearle answered, with a fond glance at the bright face opposite her.

"Well, I *have* fought some of my worst enemies pretty steadily, I own," Grace said, soberly; then added affectionately to Pearle: "But I should never have dreamed of victory if *you* had not come to help me."

"And who were your worst enemies, Gracie?" asked Sir Harold, curiously.

"Queen Self-love, General Obstinacy, Colonel Ill-nature, and Captain Laziness," she replied, with a glance half-quizzical, half-sorrowful at him.

Sir Harold bent down and kissed her tenderly.

"How very industrious you are, dear; did Miss Melfert teach you to do this pretty work?" he asked, to change the subject, and watching the slender fingers as they fluttered among the bright flosses in her lap.

"Yes, papa; *everything* that Miss Melfert teaches me is pretty and *nice*, and I assure you she does not allow indolence to thrive where she is, so please make yourself useful by holding this skein of silk for me;" and she laughingly twined it around his hands as she spoke.

Again his eyes sought Pearle's fair, pure face, and there was a shade of wistfulness in their glance. It was getting to be a common thing for him to stray into this charming

room and chat an hour or so with its fair occupants, or listen to Pearle's rich tones as she read or sang, while his eyes, as if drawn by some powerful influence, would linger upon her beautiful countenance with a wistfulness that was almost pathetic.

Often, on glancing up, she would meet this look, and the rich blood would fly into her cheeks, and the white lids would quickly droop again beneath it.

Many times he would join in the conversation between the two girls, and gradually lead Pearle to talk upon other topics which Grace could only share as a listener, and he grew more and more surprised at the culture and refinement she manifested.

A strange thoughtfulness seemed to come over him when in the presence of others, a tenderness and courtesy when in hers that began to be noticed in the household.

If she spoke of any favorite music or book, it was procured before the day was over; lovely flowers, the choicest in his large conservatory, found their way to the little table where she always sat; while, whenever she accompanied Grace upon her drives, he made it a point to attend them, to point out the places of note and interest.

Pearle never dreamed of the danger of all this, until one day, upon returning from a delightful drive in the country, Grace remarked, with a sigh of ineffable content:

"Papa, how happy we all are! Don't you hope it will always last?"

"I do indeed," he answered, earnestly, but with a look into Pearle's eyes that shocked her to her being's very center.

She fled to her own room in dismay, and sank trembling into her chair, covering her face with her hands

to hide the hot blushes which surged over it to the very roots of her hair.

"This has been like a 'city of refuge' to me," she moaned, "and now I must go away; it will not do for me to stay."

She had felt so safe, so secure there; she had neither seen nor heard anything of the one marplot of her life. The days and weeks had flowed along so smoothly and placidly, bringing with them the consciousness that she was accomplishing some real good in the world, that she was beginning to feel that her future would not be all a blank, notwithstanding that she was cut off from all the joys she had once hoped for.

But that look to-day from Sir Harold Cheswick had told her that there was danger if she continued to remain a member of his household; he must *not* speak words that would compromise both himself and her, and which could only result in disappointment to him and pain to her.

But Grace—the poor, motherless child, who had grown to love her and depend upon her so, and who had only that hour expressed the deep content and happiness she was enjoying—would it not be cruel, wrong, to desert her thus?

She could not decide the matter then; she could not decide the next day, when the child seemed ill and feverish from a slight cold she had taken, and clung to her with unusual fondness; and a week slipped by, and Pearle was still an inmate of Cheswick House.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PICTURE.

What she feared and dreaded came at last. For several days after her discovery that Sir Harold was entertaining feelings that could only bring unhappiness to both of them, she confined herself exclusively to Grace's room. The child did not seem to recover from her cold, and was troubled with a hacking cough that made her exceedingly anxious, and this of itself was excuse enough for her avoidance of the baronet.

But, one evening, as she was passing through the lower hall on some trifling service for Grace, she met Sir Harold coming from the dining-room. His face lighted with a strangely luminous smile as he saw her, and stopping directly in her path, he said :

‘Ah! Miss Melfert, I am glad to find you disengaged for a moment. I received a new picture a day or two since, and have been wishing to show it to you, and to ask you to pass judgment upon it. Will you come and look at it now?’

Pearle flushed slightly, but she knew she could offer no reasonable excuse to gratify so simple a request, and she assented.

She followed him to the library with a sinking heart, fearing that the interview would doom her to become a homeless, lonely wanderer once more.

Sir Harold led her to an elegantly carved easel, upon which there rested a superb engraving, in which there was embodied a beautiful and thrilling romance.

It represented a luxurious room in an ancient castle, in which there were five persons. The sun streamed through the high, diamond-paned, ivy-mantled window, making rich shadows upon the tessellated marble floor, lighting up the antique furniture, the pictures, and works of art which adorned the richly-furnished apartment, and casting a sort of halo around the striking tableau within.

Near the window, and just where the light shed its softest radiance, sat an elderly dame of perhaps sixty years—a delicate, high-bred woman, with the mark of the aristocrat stamped upon every finely chiseled feature. Her bearing was proud, though her attitude betrayed a little of anxiety, as she leaned forward a trifle, an intent expression upon her handsome face; and her attire, from the tip of her costly, spotless cap to the toe of her black, high-heeled satin slipper, with its buckle of silver and pearls, plainly indicated that the richest treasures of this mundane sphere were none too good for her ladyship's use and pleasure. Standing a trifle aside, and leaning upon the back of her luxurious chair, her eyes fixed with intense interest upon the face of the aged dame, was a beautiful, queenly girl, who closely resembled her in both form and feature, and who was apparently about twenty years of age.

Behind these two, and a little in the background, stood the butler, who, with his powdered wig, voluminously-ruffled shirt-front, his dignified bearing, and the consequential look upon his grave face, seemed to partake largely of the pride which gleamed so unmistakably in the eye of his mistress.

Approaching from the opposite side of the room, an expression of mingled anxiety and respect upon each face, was a young couple, upon whom the interest of the others just described seemed concentrated. One was evidently

the son and heir of the proud old house, and a noble-looking man withal; the other, a fair girl of such exquisite loveliness and grace, that Pearle involuntarily caught her breath with delight as she looked upon her.

Of medium height and slender, willowy form, with large, expressive eyes, soft, waving hair, lying above a white, symmetrical brow, with delicate nostrils, which almost seemed to expand with the quick pulsations of her fluttering heart; lips sweet and tremulous, that were parted just enough to show the pearly teeth within; her slender neck arched, and head inclined with a strange mixture of pride and humility, she seemed a creature too fair, too lovely to belong to earth.

Her lover's right arm clasped her slender waist, his left hand in that one of hers upon which gleamed his betrothal ring, as he led her toward what, judging from the expression in her lovely eyes, evidently seemed to her like a judgment seat, where she was to receive the approbation or disapproval, as the case might be, of the autocrat of the house, as to her fitness to be received within its sacred precincts as the wife of the high-born son.

"What a lovely picture, and what a story there is in it!" Pearle exclaimed, when her eye had roved from face to face and she began to comprehend it, while she forgot for the moment everything but the delight she experienced at beholding anything so beautiful.

"Who is the artist?" she asked, after a moment.

"The name is not given, I believe," Sir Harold replied, as he watched her animated face, and thought that the engraving was not the loveliest picture *he* had ever looked upon.

"I think, whoever he is, he must be an aristocrat; and it seems to me that he must have had just such an ex-

perience as is here portrayed, to have made the picture so thrilling," Pearle said, her eyes still reading those high-bred faces.

"I am glad you like it, Miss Melfert," Sir Harold said, much pleased with the enthusiasm she manifested.

" 'Like it' does not half express it—it is bewitching; and the beauty of that young girl is something wonderful," she answered, trying not to mind the glance which she felt was upon her.

"I shall hang it in Gracie's room to-morrow, and I trust she will participate in your enjoyment of it," the baronet replied.

Pearle's heart gave a quick, startled throb, for something told her that her admiration for the engraving had caused him to make this disposition of it; but she quietly returned:

"Miss Grace certainly has a very indulgent and devoted father.

"Her father is very grateful for the kindness and tact that have helped to make her so winning and attractive of late. Miss Melfert, I have no words to express my appreciation of what you have accomplished since you came to Cheswick House," he said, in earnest tones.

"Thank you; but you must not give more credit than is my due. Miss Grace herself deserves very much for her perseverance, and for the battles which she has so nobly fought and won. She is a very bright and promising girl, and if her health continues to improve in the future as it has done in the past, I trust she will be a source of great comfort to you. But," Pearle continued, with a glance at the ormolu clock upon the mantle, "the dear child will begin to wonder what has become of me, I fear, that I should be absent so long. I will ask you to excuse me,

and I will go and tell her about this beautiful picture that is to be hers;" and, with a graceful bow, she turned as if to leave the room.

"One moment more, if you please, Miss Melfert," Sir Harold said, putting out his hand to detain her; and Pearle's heart bounded into her throat at the words, for she knew instinctively, from the slight tremor in his voice, what was coming. "I had another motive aside from the picture in asking you here," he continued, speaking quickly, and with a look of great anxiety on his fine face. "Forgive me if I startle you, but I can keep silence no longer. While you have been winning my daughter's heart, you have also won mine—I have learned to love you with a strong, abiding love. I know you are a lady in every sense of the word, though some adverse fate has sent you out alone into the world; but I care not for your past—my judgment tells me there could be no fault to find with it. It is the future that concerns me. Miss Melfert, will you become my wife and the mother of my motherless child? Will you give me the right to love and cherish you as the dearest object on earth, and thus give my child an affection that shall be permanent, and guide her on in the new life she is beginning to live? Margaret—how often have I said the name over to myself of late! how well I have learned to love it!—grant, I pray, the boon I crave;" and leaning toward her, he took in his the beautiful hand that hung trembling by her side.

Pearle had grown very pale, and her face was full of the cruel pain which surged through her soul at his words.

"Lost again!" her heart cried out, bitterly; "my peaceful, beautiful home, that I was beginning to love so much, and which can be mine no longer. I must go away, away; and whither shall I turn for refuge?"

She lifted her large, gray eyes to his face, and there was a look of anguish in them that smote him to the heart.

"I think you cannot realize what you have been saying, sir," she said, sadly.

"By my soul, I can—I do fully realize it," he cried, flushing, and bending nearer to her. "Nay," he continued, as she put up her hand, with a gesture of pain, to stop him, "I must lay my heart bare before you now. It is impossible that I could live in the same house with you, seeing you every day, and knowing your goodness and gentleness, and not learn to love you with an affection that can only deepen with time. Do not tell me, Margaret, that I cannot win you. I will wait; I will not importune you; I will give you time to think calmly of what I have said, only do not crush every hope now by telling me I have loved you in vain."

"'Time to think of it' could do your cause no good, Sir Harold," Pearle replied, gently, yet firmly. "It is impossible for me ever to become your wife."

"No!" he interrupted, appealingly.

"It is impossible," she went on, as if she had not heard him; and, oh! how her sweet lips trembled and paled over the next words—"that I should ever become *any good man's wife*."

"Margaret! Ah! those are cruel words. Tell me what they mean—surely not as they sound?" he cried, passionately, and staggering back as if from a blow.

She flushed crimson at his words; then drawing herself up, she lifted her head with an air of proud dignity.

"Do not misunderstand me," she said; "I am guilty of no willful wrong—I am simply the victim of cruel circumstances. My fair fame is untarnished, my name as pure and free from stain as your own; but events of the

most painful nature have combined to drive me from home and friends, compelling me to hide from the sight of all whom I once loved."

"I knew it," the baronet cried, his face kindling again with love and hope. "I knew well enough that you were no ordinary governess; and now, if the world has been hard and cruel toward you, come to me and let me shelter you from its storms and frowns in the future; let me make you my honored, beloved wife; let me give my child a gentle, tender mother. I know Grace would love you as such and be dutiful to you; and, oh! Margaret, you can never know how my heart yearns for you. I am older than you in years, but my heart is still warm and young, and I will surround you with the tenderest care that ever man gave to woman——"

"Don't; *please* say no more," interrupted the unhappy girl, in a voice full of unshed tears. "Believe me, it is utterly impossible."

"Nothing is impossible when we are determined to conquer," he pleaded, eagerly. "I could break down any barrier—I could move mountains to win you, Margaret;" and he opened his arms as if he would infold her, and thus protect her from every evil thing.

"Sir Harold!" she said, with a tone and look that sent the blood surging back into his heart, and made him instantly drop his arms to his side.

Instinctively he knew that all his hopes must die; and though his whole soul yearned for her mightily, yet through no act of his should she ever have cause to reproach him. If she could not be his willingly, he had no right to touch even so much as the hem of her garment.

"I told you," she continued, with a shudder of aversion for what she had resolved to say, "that it was im-

possible, and I *hoped* I need not have to explain why ; but perhaps it were better that I should do so—I am already a wife !”

A low groan burst from him at this startling intelligence ; then, with a gesture of despair, he cried :

“A wife ! Then may Heaven help me !”

She stood before him, her white hands clasped almost convulsively, her proud head bent like a broken lily, her lovely face full of misery and humiliation for the confession which she had felt compelled to make.

“Surely you can be no *good* man’s wife, else you would not be here—you would not be hiding,” he said, after a moment, and striving to recover from the shock he had received.

Her tense lips relaxed into something like a smile at his words, a trifle of comfort stole into her heart, This good, noble man believed her true and pure, and imputed the wrong where it rightly belonged. Then, as the waves of her trouble rolled over her afresh, and she remembered all she had suffered and lost, she lifted her bowed head and cried out passionately :

“No ; of the vilest wretch that walks the earth.”

The trouble began to fade from the baronet’s eyes. She did not love this man who was her husband, then ? Her words, her tone, all told him that she loathed and despised him. Perhaps, after all——

“Margaret, would you be *freed* from him if you could ?” he asked, a strange, eager light in his eyes.

She nearly shrieked with pain as she remembered who, once before, had asked that same question.

“No,” she said, proudly, and controlling herself. “My own pride and willfulness were the cause of my misery, and I can never be free from him, only as I can hide from

him, unless *death* should release me." Then breaking down beneath the pitying look that swept over his face, she almost sobbed: "I thought I was so safe here—I had begun to feel content; and now I must go—go, perhaps to be caught again in the same toils that caused my ruin."

"Go! go away from here! No; you must not do that," Sir Harold said, with a start, and passing his hand across his brow in a dazed kind of way.

"Yes; it would not be right for me to remain longer, after—after what you have said to me to-night," Pearle answered, wearily.

The baronet stood silent for a moment, with sternly compressed lips and a white, troubled face.

"Miss Melfert," he then said, with sudden decision, though even his lips were colorless with the pain he was suffering, "such a proceeding is not to be thought of for a moment. Think no more of what I have said; let it be as if it never had been said. I give you my word as a gentleman that I will never refer to the subject again by either word, look, or act, although I have received a blow from which it may take some time to recover. I cannot consent to part with you on Grace's account; I believe the child would grieve herself to death to lose you now. If any one *must* go, I will go. You say you feel safe, content here; do not make *me* feel that I have driven you from your only refuge. Pray tell me, Miss Melfert, that you will remain, both for your own sake and my child's," he pleaded.

How good and noble he seemed, standing there and pleading for her, when she could see that he was suffering as no common man could suffer—how considerate for her, how courteous and chivalrous!

"Forgive me," he continued, with a slight break in his

voice, "for the pain I have caused you ; and, believe me, I never would have breathed aught to offend you had I dreamed of arousing any unpleasant memories."

He extended his hand with the frankness of an ordinary friend, though Pearle could see that it shook, in spite of the stern self-control he was striving to exercise. She laid her own within it, and, with tears she could not restrain brimming her eyes, she said, with a sob :

"Forgive *me* for unwittingly adding to the sorrow you have already had to bear. It would have been better had I never come here."

"Do not say that, please, after all that you have accomplished in that room up stairs," he returned, trying, for her sake, to speak cheerfully, as he dropped her hand, adding more earnestly as he did so : "You will stay with *Grace*, will you not, Miss Melfert?"

"I will—consider the matter," she said, hesitatingly ; and then turning, she quickly left the room.

All night long she lay awake, trying to decide what her duty was. Her heart yearned over Grace, but her inclination prompted her to go away where she would never be reminded of the sorrow she had unconsciously occasioned.

She knew she could trust Sir Harold—he was a gentleman in every sense of the word—and she knew she would be treated with all due courtesy if she remained, and she would never be annoyed by any allusion to his affection for her.

But the fact remained, nevertheless—he did love her deeply, truly ; and neither he nor she would be able to forget it, try as they would.

But Grace, poor child, would indeed be inconsolable without her, and doubtless would soon drift back into her

old willful ways again if her restraining influence was removed; besides, she was not well, she really needed her more than ever just now, and it was doubtful if any one could be found to take her place.

Yes, duty plainly said "stay;" and striving to put self out of sight, she took up her accustomed work once more, and with all her regret for what had occurred, feeling not a little relieved that she was not yet to become a wanderer again.

Sir Harold strictly kept his pledge; by neither word, look, nor act did he ever betray his love for Pearle again, and the most loyal subject could not have rendered his queen deeper respect than he accorded to his daughter's companion.

Her every want was as kindly supplied as before, her tastes gratified in the most delicate manner and without ostentation, and her life made as pleasant and peaceful as it was possible to make it.

He came frequently to his daughter's room, though not as often as before, and, while there, strove to be as cheerful as formerly; but the effort that all this cost the high-minded man was almost more than he could bear—he grew thin, and pale, and depressed.

Pearle could not fail to perceive it, and it caused her many restless nights, many bitter tears, and she longed to fly from his sight. But Grace did not seem to rally, her strength appeared to be waning, and there were some days when she could only lay back in her chair and listen to her companion while she read or sang, too weary and languid to either study or work; and all this, with his other disappointment, wore upon the baronet fearfully. Many times Pearle was tempted to cry out that her life was fated.

"Am I doomed to bring misery upon all with whom I come in contact? This good man—must *his* life also be ruined because of me?" she sobbed, when thinking thus in the silence of her own room.

"Nay," whispered the comforter, to these remorseful plaints; "your mission here was to that poor motherless child; *she* is the better for your coming. If she lives, she will beautify and bless the lives of others from your teachings and example; if she should *die*, she will be the better fitted for eternity."

So she gathered such solace as she could from this view of her trials, and waited patiently for what the future should bring her.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOMELESS.

The near future brought to Pearle a change which she had not anticipated.

Grace was one night violently attacked with the old trouble that had made her a cripple—this time in an aggravated form—and her physician gave Sir Harold no encouragement to hope that she would recover.

Her sufferings were intense, but from the first she manifested a patience and gentleness that were as beautiful as wonderful.

Her love for Pearle showed itself now more strongly than ever before; she was comparatively content while she

was by her side, but restless and nervous whenever she was absent.

"You will stay with me as much as you can for a little while longer, Miss Melfert?" she pleaded, wistfully, one night, as her wasted hand sought Pearle's with a clinging clasp.

"For a little while?" she repeated, with a sudden heart-pang.

She had not ceased to hope that the sick girl would recover.

"Yes; I shall not need you but a *little while*, and you are so beautiful I love to look at you. Ah! you can never know how I have wished to be beautiful all my life—how I have pitied and despised my poor misshapen body and repulsive face," she said, with a long-drawn sigh. "But," with a pathetic smile, "since you have been here I *have* tried to *reflect* a little of *your* loveliness."

"Dear child, do not say that," Pearle answered, almost sobbing at the child's implied doubt of her recovery. "You have a beauty that is all your own; it has been *shining through*, as I once told you it would, this long time."

"Do you really mean that, dear Miss Melfert—*shining through*?" the sick girl asked, with glowing eyes.

"I do indeed, Grace; and there is nothing more lovely than soul-beauty. You have grown very attractive of late, dear."

"You do not know how happy you have made me by saying that, Miss Melfert," the young girl said, kissing the hand she held; "to think that even a little of my life has been lovable is a great comfort. I have tried to be patient and kind like you, and to learn to trust the great, good Shepherd of whom you have told me. I think I do now,

and I do not believe I shall be afraid to go when—the time comes,” she concluded, softly, and with a far-away look in her dusky eyes.

Pearle caught her breath at the words, and a thrill of pain quivered to her very finger tips.

Grace noticed it, and drew her soft hand caressingly up to her hot cheek.

“Dear Miss Margaret,” she whispered, “I know that I have got to go pretty soon; but I am not afraid now, and you will be glad to know that it is because you have taught me *why* I need not fear. But,” and the glowing eyes clouded a trifle with pain—“but when the time comes, you must try and comfort papa, for he will need it, oh! so much.”

Pearle could only reply by kissing the feverish cheek with her trembling lips; she dare not trust her voice to speak.

“I do not know why,” the sick girl continued, and her innocent, unsuspecting words pierced her listener’s heart afresh, “but I do not think papa has been very happy during the last few weeks; something has seemed to trouble him, though he has tried not to show it. I cannot understand what should disturb him, but perhaps you can find out; you are wiser than I, and you have a way with you, too, that wins one before one knows it. Miss Melfert, will you try and comfort papa for me?”

“Darling, you must not talk like this—you must not be low-spirited, for I hope you are going to be well again by and by,” Pearle said, struggling hard for composure.

Grace drew a long, deep breath, then said, naively yet very calmly:

“I am not low-spirited, and if it were not for adding to papa’s sorrow, I think I had rather stop right here—it tires

me so to fight that naughty, wicked spirit, which I never could *quile* conquer. I wonder if mamma loved our Friend, Miss Margaret? Do you suppose she did?" she concluded, wistfully.

"I hope so, dear," Pearle replied, unsteadily, and trying to swallow the great lump in her throat, which threatened to choke her.

"I wish you would take me up and let me lie in your arms just for once more," Grace continued, longingly; then added, as Pearle raised her and drew her to her bosom. "Thank you; I love to be here. Do you remember that day when I was so very wicked, how you gathered me close to you? It seemed then as if something was driven out of me that never really came back again. How beautiful you have made my life since you have been here! I should never have known anything about happiness or peace but for you. Will you think of it sometimes, and try not to forget me?"

"I could never forget you, my dear child," Pearle replied, clasping her lovingly to her bosom, while she dropped her cheek against the curly head lying so trustfully there.

She had grown to love the young girl with a deep and strong affection, and it nearly broke her heart to hear her talk thus of dying.

"I feel almost as if I *belong* to you," Grace continued, nestling contentedly in her arms; "the good part of me, I mean—if there is any good—for you began to make me so, and helped me so kindly and patiently over the hard places. Dear, dear Miss Margaret, I believe when the time comes for you to come home to heaven, I shall be the first one to come and meet you."

Pearle thought she could not sit there and bear to hear

her talk thus much longer. The choking sensation in her throat was terrible; her heart sank lower and lower with every word, and told her that the child knew by intuition what *she* had failed to discover during all her watching by her bedside.

But she could not bear to disturb her, she was so content lying in her arms and resting upon her bosom; so she could only sit still and hold her breath to prevent her from sobbing outright.

"If you could only know how much I love you, Miss Margaret," she murmured, fondly, "and how truly sorry I am for ever causing you a moment of pain, I should be glad."

"Do not speak of it, Grace, dear. You have been a great comfort to me, and I believe I love you as fondly as if you were my own little sister;" and Pearle bent to enforce her words with a tender kiss.

"Do you really?" the sick girl exclaimed, a glad light for a moment illuminating her wan face; "that almost makes me want to live longer. Oh! if you could only have come to me before, I need not have been such a naughty child, and caused papa so many unhappy hours. Poor papa!" she said, in a sad, weary tone; "please tell him, by and by, how sorry I am. I do not like to speak of it to him now; I do not wish him to remember or think of anything unpleasant when he is near me now. He will be very lonely when I go away. Miss Margaret, I wish you would stay here always;" and the child looked up wistfully into the fair face bending over her.

Pearle sealed her lips with another kiss, a flush rising to her brow at these words, and she wondered if the child had suspected her father's own wishes in the matter; but her only reply was:

"I shall stay with you, my dear, just as long as you need and want me."

Grace seemed to be studying her face for a moment; then, with a little sigh, she closed her eyes wearily, saying:

"Sing something, please."

Sing, when her heart was nearly bursting with grief! It seemed as if she could not, but summoning all her will to her aid, she made the effort, and sung a hymn in sweet, low tones until she saw that her frail charge was sleeping, when, laying her gently back upon the pillow, she sought the nurse to take her place, and then went below to seek an interview with Sir Harold.

The library door was ajar, and she saw him sitting in a desponding attitude by the table. She rapped lightly, and the sigh which preceded his "come in" smote her heavily; but his face instantly lighted with pleased surprise as she entered.

He courteously arose and placed a chair for her, inquiring concerning his child as he did so.

With brimming eyes and unsteady voice, Pearle related something of the conversation which had just passed between herself and Grace, and asked him if he or the physician considered her in a really critical condition.

A spasm of anguish contracted his brow as he listened, and his own tones were hollow and trembling as he replied:

"Miss Melfert, I have known that she could not live from the first, and I have been trying ever since to school myself to bear it. I think," he added, with exceeding bitterness, "that the fates must have singled me out as their especial football, since I seem to be smitten on every side."

Chancing to glance up at that moment, he caught the look of keen pain that swept over her face.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "I am selfish in my sorrow, and forget that others can suffer as well as I. I ought not to weary you with my troubles."

His tone was so hopeless, and her heart was already so sore from what she had learned, that she could control herself no longer, and burying her face in her handkerchief, she sobbed bitterly.

The child she had learned to love so dearly must die; the last remaining household treasure was to be taken from this lonely, sorrowing man. It did seem almost too hard to be borne.

"I hoped," she said at last, wiping the tears from her flushed cheeks, "that Grace's rambling talk about dying was only a sickly fancy that would pass away as she gained strength."

"No; Dr. Hummel told me only to-day that she could live but a very little while; but how she should come to know it is more than I can account for—the conviction must have been intuitive. I have heard that people were sometimes warned of approaching death in that way," he said, sighing heavily.

"You should hear her talk, Sir Harold; she is as peaceful and trustful as if she was planning for some long anticipated journey."

The man groaned.

"I suppose when she is gone, my—my house will be left unto me desolate. Oh! Margaret——"

He gave her one agonized look, rose abruptly from his chair, and left the room without another word; while Pearle went weeping back to her post by the dying girl's bedside.

The day wore wearily away, and the frail sufferer grew weaker every hour. But as her bodily strength waned, her mind seemed to gather vigor and brilliancy, and the words that fell from her lips were like "apples of gold in pictures of silver"—something to be remembered and treasured by those who heard them as long as life should last.

Sir Harold spent much of his time by her couch, and strove manfully for self-control and cheerfulness while in his child's presence : but when he went out from that room he seemed crushed and bowed to the earth with the grief and rebellion that filled his soul.

The fatal day came at length, when, for the last time, they all gathered around the dying girl to watch her breathe her life away, and then, with nearly breaking hearts, folded the small fair hands over the pulseless breast, and closed the white lids over the sightless eyes.

Pearle would allow no one to robe her for her last long rest ; with her own hands she arrayed her in the soft, spotless garments in which she was to be laid away ; her fingers alone arranged with loving touch for the last time the dusky curling hair, and plucked from the conservatory the flowers she had loved best to lay over the still heart.

Grace Cheswick was far more beautiful in death than she had ever been in life, for the suffering face was calm and peaceful now ; the lines of pain were all smoothed from her brow, and a faint, sweet smile just parted her thin lips, as if when she was about to pass through the gate of pearl something of the glory which had burst upon her flitting spirit had left its impress upon the garment of clay that she was leaving behind.

Pearle had never met death face to face like this before. But it brought no terror to her ; there was nothing repul-

sive about the fair form of the girl she had so dearly loved, and whose soul she had helped to educate for Heaven. Neither could she grieve for the life so early brought to an end and freed from pain; she sorrowed for the lonely, stricken man who refused to be comforted, and who would now be so desolate and forlorn.

When the last sad rites were performed, Pearle knew that Cheswick House could no longer be her home. Her mission there was ended, her work done, and she must seek some other employment for her idle hands and aching heart.

She shrank from the change; but, knowing that it must come, she sought the baronet the day following the funeral, and acquainted him with her decision.

Whatever Sir Harold's feelings were when he received this intelligence, he managed to conceal them from her. He thanked her with deep emotion for the unvaried kindness to his child, begged that she would consider him her life-long friend, and that she would feel free to call upon him at any time and in any emergency.

He wrote a most hearty recommendation for her future use, and offered to assist her in procuring another situation. This Pearle declined, preferring not to be dependent upon any one; but on the morning of her departure, he sent up to her room two advertisements which seemed attractive, and which she determined to apply for at once.

Bidding a mournful "good-by" to the pleasant home where, for nearly nine months, she had been so safe and content, she turned her back upon it, and went out once more into the world.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE STRANGE MYSTERY.

One of the advertisements that Pearle determined to answer was for a governess for a little girl five years of age. She preferred to go to a child of this age, because she believed it would be much easier than to go among young ladies, who, she knew, were often willful and exacting; besides, she was extremely fond of children, and they were always attracted to her.

On leaving Cheswick House, she was driven directly to the address indicated, which was a few miles out of London, in a quiet, pleasant little village on the banks of the Thames River.

She readily found the street and number, and alighting from the cab, was admitted into a cozy, home-like little house, furnished with every comfort, and even with something of elegance.

The servant who waited upon her said her mistress was ill; accordingly Pearle sent her card up by the girl, and stating her errand thereon.

The servant soon returned, saying the invalid would receive her in her own room, and upon repairing thither, she found an old woman of about sixty years lying in bed, with a beautiful, fair-haired child playing by her side.

Evidently the former had had a severe illness, for her cheeks were pale and hollow, her eyes sunken and lusterless, while the hand that rested fondly on the little girl's head trembled from weakness.

Pearle repeated her errand there, and the faded eyes of the invalid searched her face keenly while she was speaking.

"Do you *love* children?" was the first question the old woman asked her when she had concluded.

"Yes, madam," Pearle replied, while her lovely gray eyes were turned smilingly upon the bright blue ones peering so curiously at her from the bed.

"Pretty lady, grandma," lisped the little one, who was very slight and small for her age; and taking possession of the trembling hand, she patted it softly with her chubby, dimpled one

"I am glad to hear you say that, for whoever I engage will have to take the entire charge of this little one. She is motherless"—here the pale, aged lips trembled painfully—"and I want some one who will be very kind and gentle toward her, and who will at the same time begin to teach her something."

The little one had climbed down from the bed during this speech, and now came and stood beside Pearle.

"Where's my mamma? Do you know?" she questioned, her large blue eyes fixed seriously and wistfully on the stranger's face.

"Has mamma gone away?" Pearle asked, evasively, not wishing to remind her of her motherless condition; and lifting her upon her lap, she toyed with the golden locks that swept over the little chubby shoulders, while something in her childish face struck her as being strangely familiar.

"Yes; mamma went away a long time ago, and never came back. Amy is tired waiting for her," the child replied, with a long-drawn sigh and a grieved quiver of her red lips.

The old lady groaned aloud at this, and covered her eyes with her hand.

"Amy," she said, after a moment, "run and ask Eliza to get your lunch, and then to bring grandma some gruel."

"Kiss, pretty lady," the little one pleaded, lifting her face to Pearle for the desired caress.

She bent and softly kissed her, more and more struck with her resemblance to some one she had seen before, yet just who she could not recall to mind.

"You stay and take care of grandma while I go," she said, confidently, as she got down from Pearle's lap and trotted away to do the old lady's bidding.

When the door closed after her, the invalid turned again to Pearle, after glancing once more at the card she still held.

"Miss Melfert," she said, and her tones quivered painfully, "if you come here, you will come to a household in deep trouble, and I am aware that it will be very dull and lonely for you; for, as you have doubtless perceived, we live somewhat retired, and we never see any company. My daughter, the little one's mother, and my sole dependence in my old age, is dead—at least, I suppose she is——"

"Suppose! Do you not know?" came involuntarily, and with an accent of surprise, from Pearle's lips.

"There cannot be much doubt about the matter, and yet a mystery of the most painful nature hangs over the event. But about your remaining, Miss Melfert—do you think you could be content here?"

"Yes, madam, if you think it will be agreeable to yourself."

"I like your face—I like your manner; it will be such

a relief if you would," the old lady said, heaving a deep sigh, as if some burden that had lain heavy on her heart was rolling away at the prospect of having some one to lean upon.

"Then we will call the matter settled," Pearle said, in a very unbusiness-like way, for no thought of salary had entered her sympathetic heart.

She had been irresistibly drawn to the beautiful, motherless Amy. This poor old lady was sick and in trouble, she needed some one to depend upon; and here was the very work which she knew would best suit her idle hands and her own aching heart, and, from the first, she had determined to stay if madam desired.

"Thank you," she said; "you look as if you have a very kind heart, and I believe you are trustworthy. Now, I would like to tell you more about my daughter, that you may better understand what your position will be here. Alice—Amy's mother—went out one afternoon to visit a sick child, about a mile distant, and never returned. As the night came on I sent a servant to inquire for her, but the woman asserted that she had only remained about an hour, and, to shorten the distance home, had taken the railway instead of the road. The servant came back that way, but found no trace of her, and no one had seen anything of her. All night long I walked the house in agony, waiting for her, and hoping she would come; but, instead, when morning broke, word was brought me that a young woman answering to Alice's appearance had been killed by the cars, and the body had been carried to the morgue in London. The fatal intelligence bereft me of all reason, and swoon after swoon kept me senseless for two days. We were strangers here then, having but recently moved to the place; we had no acquaintances or friends, and our house-

hold consisted of only ourselves and our two servants. These were so frightened by my condition that it never occurred to them to take measures to ascertain whether that woman who was killed was their mistress or not; and when at last I was able to go to see for myself, the body had been claimed and taken away from the morgue. I knew, from the description the officials gave me, that it must have been Alice who was killed, but who could have claimed her? There was but one person in all the world who would have the right to do that, and that one was the last we should have dreamed would go to the morgue to seek her, or who would have thought of finding her in London."

"But could you not ascertain who took her away? Are not people obliged to obtain an order and give their names upon such occasions?" Pearle asked, feeling deeply moved by this sad tale.

"Yes; but the name given was one I never heard before—it is very easy to give a false one, you know—and the description of the person I did not recognize. It has been a terrible trial for me to bear, for we three were alone in the world. The shock has nearly killed me, for I have been very ill most of the time since; and if I should be taken away, there is no one to care for Amy. At times I have been tempted to believe that something else might have happened to Alice—that she was not killed; but I know that nothing but death could keep her from the child whom she idolized. I have told you this, Miss Melfert, so that you may the better understand what will be required of you here. I shall be obliged to depend upon you a great deal to give orders, settle bills, and take the management of the servants, besides the care of little Amy. It is a great deal, I know, to expect; but I am so feeble I can-

not do it myself, and I have never been able to find any one until now whom I felt willing to trust."

All this had been told with great difficulty, for the woman was very weak and much broken, and was often obliged to stop to regain control of her feelings and to recover her breath.

Pearle remembered having seen an account of this sad accident to which she referred in the daily papers during the first of her stay in London, but she had never supposed she would learn who the poor unfortunate was; and now she felt a deep, almost thrilling, interest in and pity for the almost helpless old lady and her beautiful grandchild.

One thing struck her as being very strange, and that was, that no allusion had been made to the little one's father, unless that very blind reference to there being only "one person in all the world" who would have a right to take the mother's body from the morgue, meant him; and this implied something so unpleasant that she did not like to be inquisitive regarding the matter.

"I fear the place will have few attractions for you, you are so young," the woman resumed, in a weary tone, after a few moments' silence; "but something makes me wish very much to keep you."

"Madam, I desire quiet—I prefer retirement. I will do the best I can for you, although I am not skilled in the management of a household. Perhaps I can help to make you more comfortable than you have been; and as for your little one, I do not fear but that she will be happy with me. Would you like to see my references before you decide the matter fully?" and Pearle passed her the recommendation Sir Harold Cheswick had given her.

Madam was too miserable, and weak, and ill to care

very much for references. Pearle's kind, lovely face was recommendation enough for her, and a great weight of care had rolled from her heart when she had said she would stay. She merely glanced at the paper, and then passed it back.

"It is all right," she said. "When can you come?"

"I will stay now. I was about seeking lodgings until I could secure a situation; my luggage is with me, and there is no reason why I should not remain if you desire," Pearle answered, reading the wish that was in the longing eyes.

"Ah! that is very kind of you; I do desire it more than I can tell you. Miss—your name is—I forget so quickly," she added, feebly, and feeling about for the card she had dropped.

"Margaret Melfert," Pearle answered, promptly.

"Thank you; mine is Renau, the little one is called Amy Renau, and the servants' names are Eliza and Jane."

"Ah!" thought Pearle to herself, as she learned the child's name, "the poor young mother who disappeared so mysteriously must have been a son's wife, then. I wonder if he is living or dead? There is something a little strange about this friendless family, I think."

"Please ring the bell, Miss Melfert," madam whispered, apparently much exhausted, and forgetting entirely that she had not arranged with her regarding what she was to receive for her services in the household.

But this did not trouble Pearle at all; she saw that the woman's mind was as broken and weak as her body, and she thought it was a matter which would come right of itself by and by. She rang the bell as directed, and a servant answered it almost immediately.

Madam motioned for her to approach, and still speaking in a whisper, said :

"This lady, Eliza, is Miss Melfert. I have engaged her to come here and take charge of the house and care for Miss Amy, until—until I am able to be about again"—this last with a doubtful sigh. "I desire," she added, "that you make everything as comfortable and easy as possible for her. Show her to the west chamber, and then bring me my gruel and beef tea."

Pearle followed the girl from the room to the one designated for her use, feeling more and more interested in this forlorn family, with which there seemed to be connected so strange a mystery.

That night as she lay down to sleep she was haunted by the face of the young and beautiful mother of Amy. She had seen her picture—taken when a girl of eighteen, apparently—hanging in the pretty parlor below.

It was a sweet and attractive countenance, and she could have wept as she looked upon it, for the sad fate that had been hers.

"My pretty mamma," little Amy had said, pointing to the portrait, and the maid, Eliza, had sighed and shuddered as she heard her.

"Are they still trying to ascertain who claimed her?" she asked the girl, as soon as she could gain an opportunity to do so unobserved by the child.

"No, miss ; there be no one to do anything but madam, and she have been too ill, and her mind too weak, even if she knew *what* to do about it."

"It is very sad," Pearle replied.

"It be, marm, sure enough. I went with her the day she went to the morgue, and when they told her that there had been a body like what she described there, and that

some one had come and taken it away, she burst out a-wailin' and a-cryin', and then fell down in a dead faint again, and have never been able to hold up her head since," answered Eliza, nothing loth to rehearse the mysterious circumstances to a willing listener.

"They seem to be strangers here, too?" said Miss Melfert, thoughtfully.

"Yes, miss; and no kith nor kin in the world, as I can find out," assented the girl.

"Strange! Is there no lawyer, no business man to attend to their affairs?" Pearle asked, feeling justified in putting these questions if she was to have charge of the household, and convinced that madam was too weak to be troubled with them at present.

"No, marm; the young mistress always 'tended to all the business. Once a month she went up to London to some bank to get money for the expenses and to pay Jane and me our wages; but no man ever comes here but the doctor, and the ladies never went out except to visit the sick and the poor, or to take Miss Amy for a walk."

"Strange!" Pearle repeated, more and more impressed with the feeling that some deep mystery was connected with the family aside from the death of the young mother.

"Ay, it have been strange from the first, miss," said the girl, catching the word. "The young mistress were that sad and downcast sometimes that it made my heart ache to look at her; and I have seen her many a time at night bendin' over Miss Amy's little bed, cryin' and sobbin' as if her heart were fit to burst."

"Who has charge of ordering the family supplies?" Pearle asked, thinking the girl was trespassing upon ground where she had no business, and desirous of changing the subject.

"The cook, miss, since the old lady have been sick; but, between you and me," the girl added, confidentially, "I think that matter could be in better hands."

Pearle came to that conclusion also after being there a few days, and quietly assumed the responsibility of making such changes and giving such orders as she thought best. Indeed, the whole care of that household gradually fell upon her, and she found that she had both hands and heart full.

There was no time for brooding over her own troubles, nor for grieving over the dear child whom she had lately loved and lost. She did not forget Grace by any means, nor her sorrowing father, whom she highly honored and respected; but with the care of that aged sufferer, who, she saw, grew constantly weaker and failed day by day, and of Amy, too, who, although a sweet and lovable child, yet required a great deal of attention, she found the days skipping by so rapidly that she could scarce tell how they went.

— It was a strange discipline for the delicately nurtured girl. She who had never known a care, nor considered that she had a duty beyond securing her own pleasure, now had scarce an hour out of the twenty-four that she could call her own.

But this did not wear upon her; on the contrary, she grew stronger and better than she had ever been before, and was more cheerful and content than she had ever thought to be again. In thus ministering to those weaker and more unhappy than herself, there came to her a blessedness and peace such as she had never experienced in her brightest days.

"I am doing good; I am of real use and comfort to others. If I never know any other joy in life, I shall

always thank God for this experience—this consciousness that I am His obedient child, and doing as He wills.”

A beautiful, almost holy light would shine in her eyes when such thoughts as these came to her—a sweet, tremulous smile hover about her lips. She grew lovelier than she had ever been in her happiest days; there was a gentle dignity and gravity about her that was peculiarly charming, winning every one with whom she came in contact. Amy clung to her with a fondness only a degree less than what she had felt for her own mother; madam, with her failing strength and waning intellect, trusted her as if she had indeed been her daughter, and the servants obeyed with cheerful alacrity her slightest bidding.

She loved her pretty little charge dearly—she could not fail to do so when she was so winning and bright; but there was something in her face at times that would make her heart beat and thrill with a feeling that she could not define.

Where had she seen such a brow?—where that peculiar expression about the large, deep blue eyes? She could not remember; she could not tell.

CHAPTER XXV.

A CHILD'S INSTINCT.

“Madam,” Pearle said, one day, “the butcher and grocer have presented their bills. Shall I settle them?”

A number of other bills had also been sent in, and the aggregate amount began to look quite formidable to the

young and inexperienced housekeeper, and she was beginning to feel some anxiety regarding the question of settlement.

Madam, since she had found some one to lean upon, had appeared to sink into a kind of apathy, from which it was often quite difficult to arouse her, and Pearle really feared that she would fall into a state of utter imbecility.

The physician called occasionally, and though he was very kind, and seemed to sympathize with Pearle in her many cares, yet he was quite reticent regarding the condition of his patient, and a feeling of uneasiness for the future took possession of Pearle.

"Ah, yes," muttered madam, when, after several repetitions, she was made to understand the question. "I forgot to tell you where the money is, Miss—I forget, I can't remember your name—it is in that box," indicating one that stood on a table beside the bed, "and the key is there," pointing to a drawer on the left of the dressing-case.

Pearle found the key, and opening the box, found it to contain numberless receipted bills and accounts, all neatly labeled and filed according to their dates, and in one corner there was a well-worn wallet. Opening this, she discovered a quantity of bank bills and some silver, amounting in all to nearly a hundred pounds.

The sum was ample to meet all expenses for the past and the ensuing month, and she was satisfied from their manner of living that there must be plenty of money somewhere for their future needs.

She settled all accounts, paid the servants their wages, and then seeing that Amy needed new clothing for the coming winter, she took the responsibility of providing it without troubling the invalid; and yet all the while there

was a vague feeling of unrest in her heart regarding what she should do when her present supply of funds was gone. Where was she to look for more?

She kept hoping that madam would confide in her concerning her income without being questioned upon the subject, for she shrank with exceeding sensitiveness from asking how their future was to be provided for.

Several times she was upon the point of putting the important question, but a feeling of aversion stayed the words upon her lips, and so the time slipped by, until at length the day came when she bitterly repented her procrastination.

In the meantime, something occurred which turned her thoughts in another channel, and led her to fear for her own safety even in this quiet, retired spot.

One afternoon, madam seeming more comfortable than usual, Pearle took Amy and went out for a walk. The day was very fine and mild, and taking a road that followed the river, they came at length to a rustic spot where there was a beautiful fall of water.

Amy was delighted with the sight, and clapped her hands and laughed aloud at the music it made as it foamed and tumbled over the rocks, and went splashing into the ravine below. She begged Pearle to turn aside from the road, and climb upon some high bowlders which looked warm and attractive in the sunlight, and watch it.

She complied, and the little one appeared amused for a while; but, like all children, soon tiring of inaction and one thing, she finally clambered down from Pearle's side, and busied herself by running about, picking up pebbles and casting them into the stream, watching the eddies and circles they made upon its surface.

Left thus to herself, Pearle fell to musing upon the past

—upon this last year of her life, so fraught with change and incident, and wondered toward what it all tended and how it would all end.

Presently she was conscious of the sound of horses' hoofs clattering over the road, and approaching the spot where she sat. Amy heard them also, and sprang to the wayside to look.

Two horsemen came galloping along the road, and something in the appearance of one of them instantly attracted Pearle's attention, and made her heart leap into her throat with a dreadful fear. Involuntarily she drew her veil closer over her face, but the hand that performed the act trembled visibly.

She looked wildly around to see if there was any way she could flee, or any place to hide herself and the child from their sight.

No; the stream was between her and the woods beyond. If she should take Amy and speed along the road, they would overtake her before she could traverse a dozen rods, and it would be of no use to seek to hide among the rocks, for she knew they must already have seen her sitting there, and to try to conceal herself would only serve to arouse suspicion.

"*It is he! it is he!* Heaven help me to escape him!" she breathed, her strength all forsaking her, as the horsemen, on coming nearer, drew rein and abated their pace to a walk, their faces turned toward the falls, their glance resting upon the figure sitting so apparently quiet on the sunlit rocks, and upon Amy standing by the roadside.

Pearle did not seem to notice them, but they were evidently attracted by the beauty of Amy, who was standing shyly by a small shrub, her large blue eyes fixed wonder-

ingly upon the spirited steeds, her little hands toying with the bare twigs.

"What a pretty child!" said one of the gentlemen, calling the attention of the other to her.

"Yes," he returned, in tones that made Pearle's flesh creep. "I am not remarkably fond of children, but this is an uncommonly pretty one. Little one, what is your name?" and Adison Cheetham, stopping his horse, bent from his saddle to look into the face of the sunny-haired Amy.

Pearle sat upon the boulder listening, with averted face, from which every trace of color had fled.

Would they pass on without noticing her, or would they presume upon her unprotected condition and address her also?

With a suspense that was almost intolerable, and every nerve tingling with pain, she awaited Amy's answer.

"Tell me your name, pretty one," repeated the man, with a smile that he strove to make pleasant and winning, but which was sinister and repulsive nevertheless.

He glanced at the same time at the motionless figure upon the rock, but discovered no familiar outlines there, for Pearle was enveloped in a thick gray shawl to protect her from the keen air.

"You're a naughty man, and I sha'n't tell you," the child gravely replied, and with a dignity becoming a much older person, while she stepped back a pace or two, as if to increase the distance between them.

Adison Cheetham colored, but laughed as if amused at the answer, while his companion exclaimed, in a railing tone:

"Well, well, Cheetham, you know the old proverb regarding children and fools."

He flushed more deeply than before. He could not have explained why, but the words of that innocent child nettled him more than he liked to confess even to himself.

"Oh, no, pretty one; you don't mean that, I'm sure. I like little girls," he said, insinuatingly; then added, as he pointed to an exquisite little bouquet pinned upon his coat: "Do you like flowers, dear?"

She nodded her head slightly, but her little face did not relax its gravity in the least.

"Well, little golden hair, tell me your name and I will give you this;" and he proceeded to remove it from its place, determined to gain his point in this, as in all other things.

"No," returned Amy; and her small red lips were puckered up into the smallest possible compass, resolute and defiant, while she tossed her head with an independent air that was both amusing and vexatious.

Again Adison Cheetham laughed, but there was a ring of anger and impatience in the sound.

"I think you should be called Miss Willful," he said, with a slight frown; then added, lightly: "But never mind, you shall have the flowers whether or no, to prove that I am *not* a naughty man," and he playfully tossed them toward her.

They fell at her feet, but without changing her attitude, without even a look or expression of pleasure for the gift, she put forth one dainty little foot and set it exactly upon the flowers, ruthlessly crushing out all their beauty and fragrance.

Pearle, beholding her, was transfixed with surprise by the act, and forgot for the moment all her own fear and dread.

Amy was usually a most trustful and affectionate child,

and passionately fond of flowers. What, therefore, could be the meaning of this scornful rejection of the stranger's gift and its malicious destruction? Did she, simple child though she was, instinctively divine this man's treacherous character and baseness, and involuntarily shrink from both him and his offering?

The act cut him to the quick, and he bit his lips with vexation, and to keep back the fierce oath that sprang to them.

"How is this, Ryerson," he said, turning to his companion, with a sneer on his face; "am I so repulsive that a child will not even receive a pure offering like that from me?"

Somehow Amy's act made him vividly recall Pearle's aversion to him.

"Clearly, Cheetham," was the laughing reply, "whatever may have been your success with the gentler sex of a more advanced age, you do not seem to be regarded in a favorable light by this fair lady. Come, I think you had best reserve your attractions for some more appreciative beauty. Good-by, little Miss Independence. Tell your mamma up yonder that we think your education is progressing finely;" and, with a bow and a glance of amusement at the still motionless child, Ryerson rode on.

With an ugly frown on his brow, Adison Cheetham gathered up his reins and followed him, without even a backward look, much to Pearle's relief.

Amy stood watching them until they were out of sight, then walked gravely and thoughtfully back to where Pearle sat, without deigning even a glance at the scorned and crushed bouquet.

Pearle came down from the boulder and gathered the child into her arms with an almost convulsive embrace;

and Amy, feeling her tremble, looked inquiringly into her pale face, and asked :

"What is the matter, auntie?"—she had taken a notion to call her auntie, because Pearle had told her that she had a dear little girl at home who called her that. "Were you 'fraid of him, too?"

"Afraid of whom?" asked Pearle.

"Of the bad, naughty man."

"What makes you think he is bad?" she asked, inquisitively.

"I feel it in here," said the child, laying her hand upon her breast, "and—and he looked at me so. You didn't like him either, did you, auntie?"

"Why wouldn't you take the pretty flowers?" Pearle asked, evading the question and wishing to turn her attention from herself.

"He wanted to *make* me tell, and I *wouldn't*," she replied, with the same defiant pucker about her lips that she had assumed when refusing to tell Adison Cheetham her name.

"But he said 'never mind,' you could have the flowers anyway."

"Amy didn't *want* the ugly man's flowers," the child returned, making a gesture of disgust with her little hands, and Pearle marveled at the keen, perceptive faculties of her charge. They would have done credit to a much older person.

As soon as she could control her trembling nerves and gather strength to walk, for the shock she had received rendered her almost powerless to move, she hastened homeward, anxious to hide herself within the walls of the retired little house that was at present her home, lest those two horsemen should return and discover her identity.

But she only hurried into fresh trouble, for upon arriving at Madam Renau's, she found Eliza and the cook nearly distracted with fear, because they could not arouse the invalid from a stupor into which she had fallen soon after Pearle went out.

The maid had gone up to her room to give her her drops at the regular hour, but finding her insensible she had called the cook, and both had put forth every effort to arouse her, though without avail.

With a sinking heart Pearle sought the invalid's chamber, and one glance was sufficient to convince her that Madam Renau was dead.

She lay upon the bed, looking very peaceful, and, but for the cold, gray pallor which had settled upon her face, almost as if she were sleeping; but life had evidently been extinct for some time.

"Poor little Amy! what will become of her?" was Pearle's first thought; for, aside from the interest which she herself had in the child, she was now apparently without a friend or a relative in the world.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"YOU ARE NOT MARRIED?"

Strange, sad experiences were these for one so sensitive and delicate as Pearle.

To find herself the sole dependence of that frightened household, with the care of the dead devolving upon her, and not a friend to whom to turn in her extremity, were trials which at first she scarce knew how to meet.

Her first act, of course, was to send for the physician who had attended madam during all her illness.

He said that her death had, without doubt, been painless, and it was far better that her life should terminate thus; for her mind had been rapidly failing of late, and she would ere long have sunk into a state of idiocy, caused by the shock she had experienced at her daughter's mysterious disappearance, and the serious illness that had followed.

To Pearle's plea for advice as to what she ought to do in this emergency, he did not seem to know at first what to say.

"Have they no friends anywhere?" he asked, thoughtfully.

"None that I know of; madam never mentioned any relative. Amy never speaks of any one, and the servants say no one ever came to visit them."

"They seem to be people of means," the doctor said, glancing around the richly furnished room; "have they no lawyer or man of business?"

"The servants say not, and madam always appeared so sad and ill I had not the heart to question her regarding the matter. There is not even a bank-book, nor any name or paper by which I can find where their property is invested. I understand that madam's daughter went every month to London and transacted all the business of the family, and I'm sure I do not know what to do about—about anything," Pearle said, wearily, and thinking, with a shudder, of that dead body up-stairs.

"It makes it very hard for you, Miss Melfert," the doctor said, kindly, and pitying her distress; "but you and I will care for the dead according to the best of our judgment, and then consider what will be advisable regard-

ing the living," he concluded, with a sorrowful glance at Amy, who was playing with her doll at Pearle's feet; and from that moment he assumed all the care regarding the last ceremonies for poor Madam Renau.

They buried her in a quiet spot which Pearle selected in the little village cemetery, and she, with the kind-hearted physician, the friendless Amy, and the two servants, were all that followed the aged dead to her lonely grave.

When all was over, the next puzzling question was, what to do with the household furniture, pictures, clothing, and many precious mementoes which Pearle knew Amy would dearly prize when she should become old enough to realize their worth as having once belonged to her mother.

She knew there was no one to do anything but herself. They could not continue to live as they had been living, for there were no means to support them. The house must be given up, the servants discharged, the furniture disposed of in some way, and she must attend to it all.

Night after night, since madam's death, she had lain awake trying to think her way out of all the perplexities which surrounded her, while little Amy slept serenely and unconsciously in her arms; she having taken the child into her own bed from a feeling of loneliness.

"Poor little friendless waif!" she said, on retiring one night, and clasping her fondly to her, "I suppose you are a young heiress in a small way, and yet you appear to be almost as destitute as the worthless beggar who roams the streets."

"What shall be done with all these things, Dr. Ashley?" she asked him, the day after the funeral, and not yet having arrived at any definite conclusion.

"My first thought would be what shall be done with the child?" he returned, gravely, with a pitying look at the

little one, who had crept into Pearle's arms, and whose golden head was resting trustfully upon her shoulder.

"That is already decided," she returned, with the gentle dignity which became her so well, while she drew the child a little more closely to her.

"How so?" questioned the doctor, in surprise, and with a keen glance at her.

"I shall take care of her until Heaven sends some friend to claim her?" she answered, quietly.

"You!" he ejaculated, more surprised than ever.

"Yes; I have grown to love the child very dearly; she is, as you see, peculiarly winning and bright, and clings to me almost as if I were her mother. If I do not care for her, she will doubtless have to be taken to some charitable institution, and under such circumstances her future would be a very uncertain one."

"But, my dear young lady, I fear you have not thoroughly considered such a project. Think what the responsibility will be, and—and—pardon me, but I had supposed you were dependent upon your exertions alone for your own support," Dr. Ashley said, with some embarrassment.

He thought it would be too much for a person so delicate as Pearle appeared to be to have the additional care of this child, yet he admired the spirit which prompted so noble a purpose.

"And so I am," she replied; "but my wants are few, and I would willingly deprive myself of a great deal in order that a child of so much promise might be properly reared and educated."

"But I fear your own health will break down beneath such a responsibility, added to the other duties which, in your position, must necessarily devolve upon you."

"As thy day is, so shall thy strength be," quoted

Pearle, reverently, and with a trustful smile. "I believe it is intended that I should have the care of this little girl, and I can only rely upon the promises provided for those who strive to do their duty. Amy has called me auntie," she continued, with a fond look into the little upturned, wondering face, "almost ever since I came here; I have decided to adopt her as my little niece, and while God gives me strength I will care for her as faithfully as if she was really my own."

"May He bless you for a noble woman, Miss Melfert," the physician returned, admiringly, and with shining eyes. "I had longed," he added, speaking somewhat huskily, "to give her a place in my own home, but I already have six little ones, and conscience would not allow me to burden my faithful wife with any additional care."

"Thank you, doctor; but I should be very unwilling to part with my little charge, unless those who had the right to do so should claim her. I have only been with her a short time, it is true, but I feel very tenderly toward her, and whatever of good or ill there may be in store for us henceforth, we will share it together," Pearle said, hugging the sweet child to her and imprinting a soft kiss upon the golden head.

"God grant, then, that it may be good unmixed with ill, for I am sure you richly deserve it," Dr. Ashley said, with evident emotion. "Now about the furniture," he went on, after a moment; "had you thought best to dispose of it?"

"My inclination prompts me to keep everything, since I know that this little one when she is older will prize what belonged to her mother more than we can realize at this moment. However, I desire to do whatever is best. It is possible that there may be friends somewhere, and I

hesitate, being an entire stranger, to take the liberty of disposing of what I have no right to. The only difficulty in keeping the goods will be in the storing of them where they would be well cared for."

Surely Pearle Radcliffe was developing great foresight and care where once she would not have expended a thought even.

"That need occasion you no anxiety," said the good doctor, his face lighting genially. "I have a large unfinished room over my stable, which is at this little girl's disposal if you think best, and I will have a care over her belongings, and promise you they shall come to no harm if I can help it. But, pardon me again, I was thinking that you might be in need of friends with so much on your hands, and the proceeds of a sale would alone give them to you;" and he flushed as if he feared she would think he was meddling with what he had no business.

But Pearle knew he was kindness itself, and though she had received nothing for her services, beyond her living, since coming to Madam Renau, yet there was something remaining of the money she had found in that box above, and she still had the handsome sum that Sir Harold Cheswick had insisted was her due on leaving him, so that if she obtained no situation for several months she and Amy could live very comfortably.

"There is no need of anything of the kind, as I have sufficient for our needs for the present," she said, simply, adding, thoughtfully: "I think, on the whole, it is advisable for me to accept your kind offer, and preserve Amy's possessions—at least, for the present."

"I believe you are right; it would be a pity to sacrifice all these nice things to the hammer," Dr. Ashley said, glancing around the pretty parlor; "and," he continued,

"if there is anything else I can do for you, I hope you will not hesitate to call upon me."

"Thank you; I shall avail myself of your considerate offer, since I shall not feel quite so alone and helpless if I know there is some one behind on whom I can lean in case of an emergency," Pearle said, trying to smile cheerfully; but the good doctor knew that the burden she had assumed was no light one, notwithstanding her courage.

A week later the cozy home was broken up, the goods all packed and stored over the doctor's stable, and Pearle, with her lovely charge, settled once more in lodgings in London.

Her heart almost failed her at the thought of returning to the city, for she feared that Adison Cheetham was still there seeking for her; indeed, she had felt almost sure of it ever since that day when he had passed her as she sat on the rocks by the waterfall. But she knew there was no other place where she would be so likely to find a situation, and so she was forced to run the risk.

She had not long to wait, however, for Dr. Ashley had interested himself for her, and one day sent her word that an acquaintance, in whose family he was employed, wished to obtain a governess for her two younger children—a lad and miss, aged respectively ten and twelve.

He "had mentioned her," he wrote, "and the lady had said she might call."

He gave the name and address, adding that the family would only remain in London about a week longer, when they would return to their country home at Dunbarton Priory, Lady Fennelsea's country seat.

This fact of itself recommended the situation to Pearle. She longed to get into the country—to go miles and miles away from the city, where she feared every day she might

meet her deadliest foe. She cared not how solitary the place, how quiet or uneventful her life should be, so that she could securely hide from the tyrant who was her husband.

The day following her reception of the doctor's note, she called a cab, and proceeded to interview Lady Fennelsea, at her palatial residence in the region of Piccadilly.

She was somewhat stiffly received by her ladyship, who evidently believed in keeping all dependents at a respectful distance, and who at once proceeded to inspect her from "top to toe" with a glance as keen as it was comprehensive.

"Altogether too handsome," was her mental comment, as with compressed lips and lowering brow she noted her high-bred, delicate face, her sweet, deep, intelligent eyes, and the willowy figure whose every movement was one of dignity and grace.

But Pearle's manner was modest and unassuming, and devoid of any consciousness of her own beauty, and this seemed to please my lady, who questioned her carefully, inspecting with no little interest the references which both Sir Harold and Dr. Ashley had given her.

She saw at once that she was a person of no ordinary talent; she listened with delight while she played and sang; she was secretly delighted when informed that she could speak French and German fluently; for her ladyship had two older daughters, who had hitherto been under masters to perfect their accent, and this circumstance might save great expense. She saw that her manner and bearing were perfect and lady-like in every particular, and she finally came to the conclusion that the opportunity to secure such a governess was not one to be lost, despite her objectionable beauty.

"Should you object to going into the country?" she asked, after reviewing again and again the catalogue of Pearle's accomplishments, and fearing she might not like the retirement of Dunbarton Priory.

"No, your ladyship; on the contrary, I prefer the country, as the little one in my care would doubtless thrive better there," Pearle answered, supposing, of course, that Dr. Ashley had conversed with Lady Fennelsea regarding both herself and her charge.

"Little one! Have you a child?—you are not married?" exclaimed my lady, aghast, and looking again at the card Pearle had presented on her entrance.

"No, madam, the child is not mine—at least not by birth," and she smiled in spite of herself, for the woman could not have manifested more consternation had she confessed to have been smitten with some terrible plague. "I supposed," she continued, "that my friend Dr. Ashley had conversed with you concerning me, but since it seems he has not, I will explain that I have the care of a little orphan—a niece—from whom I cannot be separated."

"And did you expect that I could receive an extra child into my family?" demanded Lady Fennelsea, severely.

"No, your ladyship, I did not expect that of you, nor of any one into whose family I might go; but I did hope that I might be able to find a home or board for her near by, so that I could see her every day," Pearle answered, very quietly, but as if she had no intention of being turned from her purpose, even if it displeased a hundred Lady Fenneseas.

"It is exceedingly unfortunate; you say the child is your niece?" questioned her ladyship, suspiciously.

"My niece—or I might more properly call her my child by adoption, since I have taken her to rear as my own,"

said Pearle, not losing an atom of self-possession, although she did not fail to read the cruel thought that for an instant gleamed in the woman's eyes.

"Who ever heard of a person with a child applying for a situation as governess?" grumbled madam, discontentedly.

"Pardon me ; I will not trespass longer upon your time," Pearle said, in perfectly lady-like tones, and rising as if to go ; but the sparkle in her gray eyes, and the color in her cheek, said plainly enough that if her services were not required there was no reason why she should sit there and be grumbled at.

"Stay," commanded Lady Fennelsea, waving her back, "did Dr. Ashley know of this—this incumbrance when he recommended you to me?"

"Certainly, madam ; he is acquainted with all the circumstances regarding my adoption of this child," was the quiet reply.

"It is very inconvenient," again murmured the woman, with a frowning brow.

She coveted the services of this talented woman—she must be talented, and above all reproach, or such men as Sir Harold Cheswick and Dr. Ashley would never have given her the glowing recommendations that they had ; but she could not endure the thought of any one coming into her family, and having a single care upon her mind outside its sacred precincts.

"Why could you not put this child into some charitable institution here in the city? She would be well cared for and educated," she said, after a thoughtful silence.

"Such a proceeding I could not entertain for a moment. Wherever I go my little charge must go also. If not into the family where I am, she must at least be near me, where

I can give her some care daily," Pearle replied, very decidedly.

"And did you think it would be an easy matter to secure a desirable situation thus hampered?"

"If you will excuse me for the remark, I do not see how it can interfere with my duties wherever I go. Of course every governess is expected to have some time to herself, and, if I choose to give the hours that are my own to my charge, I do not understand how I shall be hampered in my duties to my employer," Pearle answered, coldly, and beginning to feel an aversion to becoming a governess at Dunbarton Priory.

"Pray, what do you consider the duties of a governess are, Miss Melfert?" Lady Fennelsea asked, with a tinge of sarcasm in her tones.

"The attendance upon the children during their meals, in order to teach them to behave properly at table, and also during their walks, besides the duties of teaching them in the hours allotted to their studies," was the prompt reply.

"Very good; I see you have a right idea of your position, Miss Melfert," returned my lady, somewhat mollified by her answer; "but," she added, "I forgot to mention that, besides your instruction of Fred and Clara, I shall expect you to spend an hour each day in reading French and German with my elder daughters, Camilla and Francita."

"That I should not object to doing, provided the exercise occurred during school hours," Miss Melfert answered, composedly.

Lady Fennelsea's heavy eyebrows arched themselves considerably more than was natural at this. She had fully intended that the young ladies should have an extra hour by themselves. But it was very evident that Miss Melfert understood her position, and intended to assert and pro-

tect her rights, and that if she employed her she could not hope to either browbeat or impose upon her, as she had done with the former governess, who was a meek, dove-eyed woman, with little character or will of her own.

She liked her none the less for it, though. She reasoned that she would make all the better teacher for her energy and decided ways, and that her influence would be far better over the children on account of it.

The child, however, was a great objection; but after thinking the matter over in all its bearings, she decided to secure Pearle if she could do so at any reasonable price.

"I think I shall have to give you a trial, Miss Melfert," she said at last, as if she were conferring a peculiar favor; "but I wish it distinctly understood that your charge must not interfere in the slightest degree with your duties in my family. I think, as you refuse to be separated from her, that we can make arrangements for her to reside at the porter's lodge, as they have no children there, and that will give you an opportunity to see her often without taking too much time in going to and from the Priory. The hours between nine and four you will devote exclusively to my children, and aside from accompanying them upon their walks and being present at their meals, the remainder of the day will be at your own disposal, unless now and then we should have company, and desire you to entertain them for a while with music. Your salary will be fifty pounds a year, payable quarterly, and no charge for the little girl's board at the lodge. If these terms suit you we will call the matter settled."

A feeling of bitterness arose in Pearle's heart at these very meager terms, and more than all at the overbearing manner of Lady Fennelsea. How different from Sir Harold's courtesy and generosity. Her proud spirit

prompted her to flatly refuse to become a member of her family under any circumstances, but her better judgment told her that it would indeed be a more difficult thing than she had imagined to find any desirable position where she could take Amy with her; so, curbing her indignation, she signified her willingness to accede to the terms offered.

Lady Fennelsea chuckled inwardly at this, for the salary she offered her was twenty-five pounds less than she had paid her last governess, to say nothing of the expense she would save by dispensing with masters for the young ladies.

To be sure the child's board would be something, but even counting that, there would be a great saving.

"We leave London on Monday morning," her ladyship said, and rising to signify that she wished the interview closed; "can you be ready to accompany us?"

"Yes, your ladyship."

"Then perhaps it will be better for you to come here on Saturday evening, and that will save confusion about starting Monday; besides, it will give you a little opportunity to become acquainted with your future pupils, Master Fred and Miss Clara. Ah! one thing more—when we have no guests we would be glad to have you dine with the family occasionally; at all other times your meals will be served with the children's in the nursery."

Lady Fennelsea doubtless thought she was conferring marked distinction upon the proud governess by this concession, but Pearle merely bowed to signify that she understood, mentally resolving that such occasions should be very few and far between, and then took her departure, being gracefully dismissed by a wave of my lady's fat, white hand.

CHAPTER XXVII.

PEARLE MAINTAINS HER DIGNITY.

"Madam little mistrusts to whom she is speaking, nor to whom she assumes that lofty and overbearing manner," Pearle said to herself, with a scornful curl of her lip, as she passed out of the aristocratic mansion and was driven back to her humble, quiet lodgings.

"If the young ladies and children copy their mother's example," she continued, musingly, "I fear my life will be none of the pleasantest at Dunbarton Priory. But, however, the die is cast, and I will make the best of it, at least until something better presents itself."

Saturday evening she, with Amy, repaired to Lady Fennelsea's, and not few were the curious glances bestowed both upon herself and her little charge by the several members of the family.

Amy's exceeding beauty was much commented upon.

She was slight and almost fairy-like in her proportions, and the long, curling hair that hung like a golden mist over her graceful shoulders, showed that great care had always been expended upon it, and Pearle dearly loved to arrange it in the most becoming manner. Her features were delicate and attractive, her skin faultlessly fair, while all her little garments were fashioned with a daintiness and taste that added much to her general appearance.

"What a lovely little fairy!" exclaimed Francita, the second daughter, who was an impulsive, but really kind-hearted, girl of sixteen, and who appeared perfectly delighted with the child.

Miss Camilla—a showy young lady of nearly nineteen—sneered at her evident admiration of the strangers.

“It seems to me that Miss Muffet, or whatever her name may be, puts on a good many airs for a poor governess, with a brat on her hands; the idea of dressing the little thing up in that style; why, there was real Valenciennes lace on her apron.”

“Camilla, I am astonished that you should use such language in speaking of any one,” reproved Lady Fennel-sea, severely. “I suppose Miss Melfert—that is the governess’ name, not Muffet—has a right to dress the child as she chooses, although I must confess, I think myself she might make a wiser use of her money,” and her ladyship looked exceedingly grave over such evident extravagance.

“Perhaps Miss Melfert did not have anything to do with the little one’s clothing, after all,” interposed Francita, who had been instantly prepossessed in Pearle’s favor; “it may have been the mother, who liked to see her as prettily dressed as other children.”

“But her mother is dead, and Miss Melfert has *adopted* her, you know,” returned her sister, with another sneer.

“You do not know how long she has been dead, and I’m sure it is very kind in Miss Melfert to keep her looking so nicely,” persisted Francita, determined to defend the absent.

“I think you have discussed the point sufficiently,” said their mother; “it can’t be nothing to us if Miss Melfert chooses to spend her own money in that way; at all events, she dresses plainly enough herself.”

“I think you did not show your usual good judgment when you engaged her,” Miss Camilla asserted, pouting; “she is too handsome for a governess, and as for that child, you need not think that I am going to believe she is either

her *niece* or an *adopted* child;" and the young lady concluded with an exceedingly suggestive shrug of her shapely shoulders.

"Camilla," exclaimed Lady Fennelsea, aghast, "surely you do not suppose that such men as Sir Harold Cheswick and Dr. Ashley would recommend her if she was not worthy."

"They may have known nothing whatever of the child," said Miss Fennelsea, expressively.

"But Miss Melfert assured me that Dr. Ashley was acquainted with all the circumstances of her adopting her."

"*Perhaps* he may be; but my way would have been to interview him regarding the matter before engaging her. But leaving the young one entirely out of the question, I warn you that this handsome governess will make mischief for you before you have done with her," concluded the young lady, looking very wise.

"How so?" demanded her ladyship, while Francita asserted that Miss Melfert was not to blame for her good looks, and as for her part, she liked some one pleasant to look at when she was reciting her lessons; for Miss Roscoe, their former governess, was so painfully ugly, it made her nervous.

"You forget that Ambrose will be coming home by and by," pursued Camilla, "and that he may bring friends with him. You know what a *penchant* all men have for pretty faces, and I for one do not wish to be outshone by a governess."

"I think you are unnecessarily disturbed," replied her mother. "Miss Melfert is very good-looking I admit, but she is very quiet and modest, and appears to know her place. However, when we have company it will be a very easy matter to keep her in the background."

Her ladyship strove to speak unconcernedly, but in reality she did experience considerable uneasiness upon this point. Miss Melfert looked so much prettier and younger with her bonnet off; her manners were so polished, and she was so self-possessed and graceful, that Miss Fennelsea was thrown decidedly into the shade beside her. But she could not help it now, and must make the best of a bad bargain, at least for the present.

The next week found the family all settled at Dunbarton Priory, a lovely estate that had once belonged to an order of monks, but the buildings having been partially destroyed by fire, the property had been sold to an ancestor of Lord Fennelsea, and had finally descended to him.

His lordship had died some five years before our story opens, but during his life-time he had aimed to make his estate one to be proud of. The neglected land had been brought up to a high state of cultivation, the Priory and farm houses were put in thorough order, and at his death her ladyship found herself the mistress of a handsome town-house and this beautiful country home, besides a goodly bank account. It really was quite satisfactory.

According to her husband's will, the priory was to become the property of his eldest son when he became of age; but the young man—the Ambrose referred to by his sister—although now twenty-two years of age, showed no disposition to settle down to a quiet life, and so matters still went on pretty much as they always had done.

The second week after the arrival of the family at the Priory, the real business of Pearle's life began, and she found it no easy one.

The two young children were more easily managed than the more willful young ladies, for they were not long in learning that their governess demanded implicit obedience

while in the school-room, and always rewarded them for it during their hours of relaxation. She was so patient and gentle, too, with them, notwithstanding her firmness, that it was not long before she had completely won their hearts.

She had not been a member of the family a month before Lady Fennelsea remarked upon their altered behavior.

"I must say that Fred and Clara are vastly improved," she remarked one day, after having visited the nursery at meal time. "Miss Melfert has taught them to be very quiet and civil at table, they are much more respectful to me, and more amicable to each other."

"There was chance enough for improvement, and they take to her wonderfully; but one would think that she had once belonged to the queen's household from the dignity she puts on," returned Miss Fennelsea, who lost no opportunity to say something unpleasant of Pearle.

She cherished a petty spite against her, both on account of her beauty, and because she would not allow herself to be browbeaten or snubbed by the haughty damsel during the hour that she had spent each day reading French and German with the young ladies.

"Her dignity is not 'put on;' it is natural to her, and I am glad it is so. If you would try to copy Miss Melfert in that respect, Camilla, I should be better pleased," Lady Fennelsea said, gravely.

"Indeed! I think things have come to a pretty pass, that you should set your governess above your own daughter," was the angry and disrespectful retort.

"Miss Melfert's deportment is perfect; I have no fault to find with it, which I am grieved to say is not the case with your own, my daughter," replied her mother, severely.

"Don't forget the old adage regarding a new broom, if you please, mamma. I'll wager my diamond necklace

that this paragon of yours can let her temper fly upon occasion, and I'll prove it to you in less than a week," snapped the angry maiden, with an ominous, savage glitter in her black eyes.

"I shall be exceedingly displeased if you do anything to offend Miss Melfert, Camilla," returned Lady Fennelsea, uneasily.

Miss Camilla deigned no reply, but flounced angrily from the room, resolved that she would be revenged upon the innocent governess, but for what particular offense she could not have told had she been questioned.

She had maintained a haughty and defiant manner toward Pearle ever since her advent among them, and made supercilious and unkind remarks upon every occasion, until the much tired girl began to fear that her stock of patience would not hold out long against such assaults. But thus far Miss Camilla had not been able to ruffle even the smooth surface of her brow, although inwardly she rebelled at such malice and ill-nature.

A few days after the above conversation between Lady Fennelsea and her daughter, a scene occurred in the school-room, which none of Pearle's pupils ever forgot, and which served to establish her position in the family upon a surer foundation than it had hitherto rested.

Bitter as her experience had been, and much as she desired to hide herself from the world where she had suffered such shame and mortification, there was still a sense of independence about her, a feeling that there was really no need of her bearing abuse or insolence from any one.

She had but to stretch forth her hand, and a full purse was at her command; she had but to apply to her brother, and all her trials in this respect would end.

But if she did this, the earl would insist upon her return

to Ashton Manor, and she could not bring her mind to that at present, for Adison Cheetham would surely find her there, and—and *Richard's home was too near for her peace of mind.* One morning—she always devoted the first school hour to the young ladies, that they might be free for the remainder of the day—Miss Camilla came to her French exercise in an unusually sulky and perverse state of mind.

They were, that day, to begin reading the “Life of Victor Hugo,” in the original; but Miss Fennelsea, who was not extremely well versed in French, recited the rules from her grammar so badly that Pearle felt obliged to reprove her for not having devoted more time to them.

An angry red glowed upon the young lady's cheek, and she tossed her head with haughty defiance.

“Miss Melfert forgets that she is here to *serve*, not to dictate,” she said, imprudently.

The color deepened in Pearle's cheek also at this, but without betraying her feelings in any other way, she calmly replied :

“My duty to Lady Fennelsea demands that I shall be thorough in whatever I undertake; you can never learn to read the languages fluently, unless your rules are first correctly committed to memory. You will please commit those I have assigned for to-day, and I will give you an extra half hour after school this afternoon in which to recite them.”

Miss Camilla scowled unpleasantly, overlooking entirely the fact that Pearle had kindly offered to devote her own time to her.

“I shall do no such thing,” she said, insolently. “I have an engagement for this afternoon, and once for all, Miss Melfert, I wish you to understand that I am not to

be dictated to by you, as to when I shall either learn or recite my lessons."

"Very well; then I will excuse you from further readings in both French and German, until these rules are committed at your leisure," returned Pearle, with imperturbable gravity and politeness, but with unmistakable firmness.

Camilla regarded her in undisguised astonishment.

"Do you mean that I am not to participate in the readings at all, until I comply with your demand?" she asked.

This was putting it rather stronger than Pearle liked, but it was what she meant nevertheless, and so she bowed her head in assent.

The girl laughed mockingly, and opened her book with a glance of defiance at the young teacher.

"For shame, Camilla," whispered Francita, with a face crimson with mortification for her sister.

"Attend to your own affairs, Miss Impertinence; I shall do exactly as I see fit," was the spirited retort; and she settled back in her chair, raising her book as if to begin her reading.

Pearle saw that a tussle was imminent, and she braced herself for the encounter, determined not to yield an inch of her ground.

"Miss Francita, will you read the first ten lines? Be careful of your pronunciation, your pauses, and inflection," she said, ignoring Miss Camilla entirely.

There was an ominous glitter in that young lady's eyes.

"By the way," she interrupted, before her sister could comply with Pearle's request, and looking at the title of the book in her hand, "what made you choose the 'Life of

Victor Hugo' for us to read? Do you like his works? Did you ever read his 'Les Miserables?'"

Pearle did not dream toward what all these questions tended, and not wishing to seem ill-natured, she overlooked the interruption, and answered:

"I chose the work because I thought it would be both instructive and interesting. I like some of Victor Hugo's works, some I do not, and I have read 'Les Miserables.'"

"Then, of course, you remember all about Fantine."

"Yes," Pearle said, unsuspectingly, as she remembered that poor girl so wronged and deserted.

"Well," continued the girl, boldly, "she was the mother of Corsette, you remember? And do you know *you remind me of her?* There is something wonderfully mysterious about you, and I'd be willing to wager considerable that you have a history equal to hers—Fantine's I mean."

The words had scarcely passed her lips before she regretted having given utterance to them; but they could not be recalled, and she awaited with some curiosity the result.

Francita regarded her sister in horrified astonishment, and feeling as if she would be glad to have the roof fall and hide her from the startled, almost terrified gaze that she saw creeping into Miss Melfert's eyes, as Camilla's meaning dawned upon her.

A vivid scarlet mounted to Pearle's brow as she comprehended this unparalleled insult, then as quickly receded, leaving her as white as a piece of wax.

For a full minute she was utterly speechless, her strength almost forsook her, and the conflict within her heart was terrible.

But she had long since learned where to look in the midst of trial, and by the time sixty seconds—though to

the startled occupants of the school-room they seemed like sixty minutes—had ticked themselves off her watch, she had, to all outward appearance, at least, regained her self-possession.

"Miss Fennelsea, I will excuse you from the school-room until you see fit to apologize for the insult you have just offered me," she said, laying her book face down upon her desk, and speaking as calmly as if she had merely asked some simple favor.

That young lady looked the surprise she could not speak. She had measured Pearle's nature by her own, and had expected to see her fly into a towering passion at the affront, and say things that would cause her mother to dismiss her on the spot, and she began to feel exceedingly uncomfortable at the turn affairs were taking.

But Pearle's request that she would leave the room angered her, and folding her arms defiantly, she retorted :

"I *believe* I am in my own home."

The two children had been looking on and listening in open-eyed wonder, and Master Fred now burst forth, indignantly :

"I say, Cam, Miss Melfert is a *lady*, and you are ——"

"Silence, you saucebox !" she interrupted, imperatively.

"Miss Fennelsea, I must *insist* upon your withdrawing from the school-room, and at once," Pearle now said, in tones there was no mistaking, while her beautiful eyes were fixed gravely and steadily upon that young lady's face.

She laughed again mockingly, but it was evidently an effort, and her gaze drooped guiltily, although she did not offer to move from her position.

Pearle waited a moment, then rising, continued, with a decision that showed she would not retreat from her position :

"I shall feel obliged to seek Lady Fennelsea myself, and explain the cause of this disturbance, unless you comply at once with my request."

Camilla started.

She had not intended carrying matters quite so far as this, and she had not imagined that the governess would have spirit enough to acquaint her mother with the insult she had offered her; but if the story must be told, she preferred to do the telling herself.

"Ah, yes, thank you for reminding me," she said, superciliously, and rising. "Mamma certainly ought to be informed of your impertinence to me. I will go directly to her."

Pearle did not take any notice of the remark, but remained quietly standing, while the discomfited girl beat an ignominious retreat, painfully conscious of the fact that she was leaving the despised governess mistress of the field.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NO SIGNS OF THE ENEMY.

Pearle had an unusually quiet time in the school-room after the departure of Miss Fennelsea. Her pupils were docile and subdued, but she was nearly ill from the effects of the exciting scene of the morning, and when the last lesson was recited, she retired to her own room with a raging headache and a heart that was heavy and sore.

She had scarce settled herself comfortably, with a wet bandage around her head, her smelling salts and aromatic

vinegar within easy reach, when she received a peremptory summons to attend Lady Fennelsea in her boudoir.

With a feeling that the interview would undoubtedly terminate her labors as governess in the family, yet, with her dignity not disturbed one whit, and a consciousness that she was justified in the course she had pursued, she went calmly and confidently forth to do battle for herself.

She found her ladyship sitting in solemn state, like a judge waiting to pass sentence upon some criminal.

There was a grave and troubled expression in her eye, however, as she furtively scanned the governess' beautiful face, and marked her graceful and apparently undisturbed manner.

"Miss Melfert," she began, somewhat haughtily, and without showing her the civility of asking her to be seated, "I have sent for you to learn your version of the disgraceful scene which occurred in the school-room this morning."

"On account of which I am as much grieved as you can possibly be, madam, since my aim has been, during my stay here, to be faithful in the performance of my duties," Pearle answered, with gentle gravity.

Lady Fennelsea made a gesture of impatience.

"Please relate just what occurred without further comment," she said, loftily.

Pearle's form was a trifle more erect; her head was lifted just a little with an air of conscious pride at this curt command; but she repeated accurately what Lady Fennelsea had already learned from each of the three younger children, Camilla's version of the affair having been entirely different, and to favor her own cause.

"I am exceedingly sorry that anything so unpleasant should have transpired, Miss Melfert, and I acquit you of

all blame in the matter," my lady said, in gracious tones, but at the same time searching the flushed face before her with something of curiosity, not unmixed with anxiety. "But," she added, "I trust your native good sense will prompt you to overlook the matter, and go on with the lessons as before. I promise you you shall never be annoyed in the same way again."

Pearle's eyes glowed. Her "native good sense" did *not* prompt her to "overlook" so malicious an insult, at least without some reparation or expression of regret on the part of the offender.

Lady Fennelsea thought she had never seen any one half so beautiful as Pearle was at that moment, when, taking a step forward, her slender form drawn to its utmost height, and her head lifted with an air that would have become an empress, she said, respectfully but very decidedly, as she calmly and steadily met the gaze of the proud woman before her:

"Your ladyship will pardon me, but I cannot consent to 'go on with the lessons as before.' I cannot receive Miss Fennelsea in the school-room again, without a suitable apology for the affront of this morning."

"Do you not think that you are making too serious a matter out of an impulsive girl's thoughtless speech?" her ladyship asked, mildly, willing to be conciliatory, yet taken somewhat aback by Pearle's decided assertion.

"Madam, it was not the 'thoughtless speech' of an 'impulsive girl;' it was a bold and premeditated insult—an insinuation so vile that no one with a particle of self-respect would tamely submit to it," the governess replied, dauntlessly.

Madam flushed. She wondered at herself for allowing any one in her service to speak so independently in her

presence; but something in Miss Melfert's manner and bearing had impressed her from the first with the feeling that she was in some way far superior to the common class of governesses, and she had involuntarily yielded her more respect and consideration than she was aware of. Still, Pearle's last remark had aroused her ire.

"Do I understand that you *will* not allow the affair to drop where it is?" she asked, stiffly.

"Your ladyship, if I cannot have the respectful attention and obedience of my pupils in the school-room, it will be useless for me to attempt to teach them."

"That is very true," assented her ladyship.

"My treatment of your daughter," Pearle continued, without heeding the interruption, "has, without exception, been kind and considerate, and, I may add, forbearing, for I have overlooked much that was abusive from her. The insult of to-day was entirely unprovoked, and I would, on no account, subject myself to a repetition of it."

Lady Fennelsea was a woman possessing more than ordinary intelligence and good sense, although it was somewhat warped by a false kind of pride. She knew that Pearle had the best of the argument, and she was very angry with Camilla for her unpardonable behavior that morning; at the same time, there was an element of pride and arrogance in her nature that led her to treat her dependents as if they were beings of a lower order, and for a moment this feeling now got the better of her judgment, and she was tempted, as her daughter had desired, to dismiss the proud girl on the spot.

But prudence whispered that such a proceeding would be very unwise. The children were progressing finely in their studies, were better behaved and more gentle than

they had ever been before. Francita was deeply interested in the languages, and improving in her music. There would be no end of trouble in finding any one to fill Miss Melfert's place; city governesses did not like to go into the country in the dead of winter, while the interruption would be of great injury to the children. But she would not yield without a struggle.

"Do you not think you assume a good deal for a person in—in your position, Miss Melfert?" she asked, sarcastically.

Pearle's delicate lip curled a trifle at this question, but she quietly answered:

"Madam, notwithstanding my 'position,' I am a gentleman, and whatever I do, wherever I go, I intend to command not only my own self-respect, but the respect of others—that, at least, I will not forfeit under any circumstances."

"Really, Miss Melfert, one would infer from your manner that you were some high-born lady of the land, and had been accustomed all your life to the homage of every one with whom you came in contact," Lady Fennelsea remarked, with some asperity.

Again the girl's fair face flushed, the rich color mounting to the soft waves of hair that lay upon her forehead, while a spasm of pain convulsed her beautiful lips—all of which the keen eyes of her ladyship did not fail to observe; but Pearle made no reply, and the other continued:

"I regret that you should take such a stand, as I know it will be useless to try to persuade Camilla to apologize to you. She is very high-spirited, and though she may be conscious that she has wronged you, she will never humble herself sufficiently to say so."

She hesitated a moment as if waiting for Pearle to speak, but she still remained silent, and her beautiful face did not relax a muscle. This did not appear very promising for madam's cause, but she went on, with considerable assurance :

"Therefore, I do not see but that you will be obliged to strain a point for once. I am exceedingly anxious that she should go on with her lessons, for she is quite backward in the languages, and as next year we expect to travel upon the Continent, I wish her to be well versed in French and German. There are no masters within easy reach of the Priory ; and really, Miss Melfert, I desire that you should be amicably disposed toward every member of my family."

"I assure you that I *am* so disposed, and nothing would give me greater pleasure than to be friendly with Miss Fennelsea ; but, allow me to say, that it rests wholly with her to decide whether it shall be so or not. I bear her no ill-will, and should she feel inclined to manifest regret for what happened this morning, with a promise to give me her respectful attention in the future, the readings can go on uninterrupted as before."

The tone in which this was uttered plainly indicated that Pearle meant every word.

Lady Fennelsea bit her lips with vexation. She had never had a governess before whom a word from her would not subdue into abject submission ; but she was also conscious that she had never had one so accomplished, for was she not saving hundreds of pounds that she had hitherto been obliged to pay out to masters for both music and the languages ?

It was exceedingly mortifying, however, that she could not make Miss Melfert yield to her, and to realize that if

she wished to retain her services, *she* would have to be the one to "strain a point."

For a moment there was a struggle between pride and policy; but the latter triumphed, as it always does when the pocket is under consideration.

"Very well," she said, with great dignity. "I think you are quite obstinate, but I will consider the matter a while, and I hope it may be amicably adjusted. I will add, in my own behalf, however, that I am deeply displeased with Camilla for her rudeness to you;" and Pearle was dismissed with the usual wave of my lady's fat hand.

Miss Camilla could not be induced to offer any apology to the despised governess.

"The idea that you should *suggest* such a thing, mamma!" she said, disdainfully, and with an angry toss of her head, when Lady Fennelsea had urged upon her the propriety of doing so.

"But you did shameful outrage to her feelings, and I desire you should make proper atonement," replied her mother.

"Proper atonement! You mistake me vastly if you imagine *I* would stoop to apologize to your governess—that proud, haughty upstart."

"Camilla, I will not allow you to use such language in my presence," said Lady Fennelsea, severely.

"You can blame yourself for my dislike for her," retorted her dutiful daughter. "I have not liked her from the first, and I do not believe she is what she pretends to be at all."

"Whom do you think she is?"

"I don't know; but she is altogether too high and mighty to belong to the poor governess class. I should not be surprised if she belonged to some good family, and

having fallen into disgrace, had taken this way to hide herself," returned Camilla, coming nearer the truth than she dreamed.

"I wish you would not be so suspicious of people," said her mother, with a sigh.

"Time often proves a great deal—wait and see, if you are bound to keep her, only don't let her come in my way. I shall take no more lessons of her."

"Do you intend to give up your French and German?" cried Lady Fennelsea, in dismay.

"No; I will have a master."

"Ah! but that will be such an expense."

"It will cost no more than it used to," retorted Camilla, disrespectfully; "and if you do not want your handsome governess abused, keep her out of my way, that is all;" and the proud heiress swept from the room, slamming the door in no gentle manner after her.

Pearle did not regret Miss Fennelsea's decision; she had been a source of annoyance to her from the first, and it was a matter of great relief when she was informed that Miss Camilla would pursue her French and German under masters at the county town about three miles distant.

Francita continued her lessons with Miss Melfert, striving, by sedulous attention and respectful demeanor, to atone as far as she was able for the cruel outrage Pearle had received from her sister, and all was peace and harmony in the school from that time.

Little Amy, who lived with the porter and his kind-hearted wife, proved a source of great comfort to Pearle. Every day she went to her, or had her come to her own room at the Priory, where it was a delight to teach her the simple lessons she could learn.

The child grew more beautiful and winning every day,

and our sad-hearted heroine often found herself hoping that no friend would ever come to light to claim her—that if she must live out a long and lonely life, she might at least be spared this one little ray of sunshine to cheer her on her way.

She never suspected how intimately the friendless waif was connected with her past life, nor how closely their future would be interwoven.

She began to feel quite safe as the winter passed and spring began to open, for her life, though quiet and monotonous, was not unpleasant, and no signs of her enemy had come to startle or trouble her, and she began to look upon Dunbarton Priory as a permanent home for herself and little Amy.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TWO FRIENDS.

Leaving Pearle plodding along in her wearisome duties, we must turn our attention elsewhere for a little while.

On that fatal wedding-day, when it seemed to Richard Byrnholm as if the brightness had all departed from the heavens, and the earth was but a dreary blank, he remained at Ashton Manor only long enough to see his enemy depart, and to become convinced that Pearle had indeed flown from him; then he, too, left the place and returned to his desolate home—desolate in spite of its beauty and luxury, for the bright presence which he had expected to bring to it, he believed, could never dwell there now; and

there was a solemn stillness in every hall and room, as if death had been there and robbed them of all life.

He sought his room and shut himself in from the sight of every human eye, save that of his valet, and for nearly a week yielded to the misery and pain that almost crushed him.

His trust in humanity was well-nigh destroyed, for he had had unlimited confidence in the friend of his school-days, and now to discover such cold-blooded treachery, such malice and vindictiveness, in one whom he had so trusted, was like removing some strong foundation from his life, while the loss of the fair girl whom he had literally worshiped, well-nigh dethroned his reason.

The whole country was ringing with the scandal of the strange marriage and the flight of the newly-made wife; and Richard, when at length he tried to face his desolate condition, felt that it would be impossible for him to remain longer at Linden Grange, where every article in the house had been arranged with some tender thought of his promised bride, and was now a continual reminder of his misery.

"I must go away somewhere and hide from it all. My Pearle has flown, she is lost to me forever, and I do not care what becomes of me now; only let me go where I am not known—where no sound of this dreadful thing can reach me, nor curious eyes gaze upon me with their pitiful stare," he cried, one morning, with a sort of despairing energy, when it seemed as if his aching heart must break beneath its weight of misery.

Acting upon the impulse of the moment, he packed a few articles of wearing apparel in his portmanteau, and, without telling even his valet of his intention, took the first train for London that he could catch.

Here for weeks he wandered hither and thither, fluctuating between his club and the hotel, growing more and more restless and unhappy, and more rebellious against the ruthless fate that had blasted all his hopes.

At length he decided to go still farther away, and strive to lose himself in the excitement of visiting new scenes. Accordingly he returned to Linden Grange, shut up the house, dismissing all the servants save one to remain with the housekeeper, and the gardener, then, turning his back upon his beautiful home once more, became a wanderer for many months.

But this did not ease his pain. Wherever he went, whatever he did, one fair, beautiful face haunted him continually—one sweet, loved voice forever rang in his ears, torturing him with that last, mournful farewell which had nearly broken his heart, “My love, my love—for such you will be till I die—good-by forever.”

When he lay down to sleep at night he seemed to hear Pearle’s despairing tones repeating it; it haunted his dreams, torturing all his sleeping hours. When he arose in the morning, it greeted him like a knell for the dead, until his brain was nearly turned, and he was driven almost to the verge of insanity.

He crossed the broad Atlantic and traversed America’s strange shores; he wandered through the forests and enchanting regions of Maine, skimmed the great lakes, and sailed the length of our great “Father of Waters;” he crossed the wide-stretching prairies, climbed the Rocky Mountains, lost himself among the wonders of the far-famed Yosemite, and lounged among the orange groves of Florida and the far Southwest. But all to no purpose; he could not forget; his aching heart constantly cried out with bitter longing :

"Pearle—my fair, lost Pearle—where are you? I must go back and find you. Let me break the hated bonds that bind you, and then I shall know something of peace once more."

Thus a year passed, and, wearied and worn with his restless wanderings and with the ceaseless pain and struggle within, he at last returned to England, a faint hope animating him that Pearle might ere this have returned to her brother at Ashton Manor, and would, perhaps, now consent to a divorce, if one could be obtained.

It was a dismal, rainy night when he reached London, but, notwithstanding, something of a comfortable, home-like feeling pervaded his heart as he traversed the familiar streets, and realized that he was upon his native soil once more.

He turned his face toward St. James' Square, longing to get once more within the friendly shelter of his club-room, and walking with a more elastic tread than had been his since leaving England. On suddenly turning a corner, some one ran against him with great force, which sent him spinning against the wall of a building and hurled the stranger to the ground.

A deep groan escaped the latter as he struck the pavement, after which he lay silent and motionless, as if stunned by the force of the fall.

Richard Byrnholm almost immediately recovered himself, went to the stranger's assistance, and, with much difficulty, raised him to his feet.

"Are you badly hurt?" he asked, as the man leaned heavily against him and groaned again.

"My head feels strangely, and I fear my right ankle is either broken or badly sprained," was the reply, in tones which sounded wonderfully familiar to Richard; but the

fog was so dense, and the street-lamp at such a distance, that he could not distinguish the man's features.

"I will help you to that flight of steps, and then I will call a cab for you," he said; and supporting him to some steps in front of a house, he seated him there, and then went for a carriage with all possible speed.

In less than ten minutes he returned with a cab, and, with the assistance of the driver, succeeded in getting the injured man into it, although every movement seemed to cause him excruciating pain.

"If you will allow me, I will see you safely home, since I have been instrumental in causing the accident," Richard said, when he was seated and his leg propped upon the cushions.

"Thanks; but I do not like to trouble you," replied the stranger, suppressing a cry of pain,

"It will be no trouble. Where shall I tell the man to drive?" Richard said, entering the cab, and determined to help the sufferer home.

"No. — Hyde Park Corner," was the reply, and Richard knew that this new acquaintance must belong to the higher class or the nobility to live in that quarter of the city.

The ride was a short though very painful one to the injured man, and when they reached their destination, a couple of servants were called to assist in conveying him to his room.

Richard was impressed with the evidences of wealth and luxury on every hand, as they entered the grand house, and when at last the stranger was laid upon his bed, the gas turned on full and strong, and he saw his face for the first time, a startling revelation was made to him.

"By Jove! Sir Harold Cheswick! do I find you here,

in the very heart of London, after so many years?" he exclaimed, in tones of astonishment and pleasure.

Sir Harold smiled in spite of his pain, and opening his eyes, searched the eager, surprised face bending over him.

"Richard Byrnholm!" he said, himself astonished, and holding out his hand cordially. "Surely," he added, "my accident has proved a blessing in disguise, since it has sent you to me. How are you, my boy?"

"Not feeling as well as I should if I had not brought such misfortune to you," Richard answered, ruefully.

"Never mind; you are not to blame. Let me get this troublesome ankle attended to, and then I can take some comfort in looking at you. If you have nothing special on hand, stay with me to-night."

Richard was only too glad to do as he was requested.

Sir Harold was a dozen years older than himself, but he was, nevertheless, one of his truest friends. When a young man, and while Richard was in his teens, the baronet had rendered some valuable service to the boy's father, and thus an intimacy was established between the two families.

Sir Harold visited at Byrnholm Lodge a great deal after that, and, notwithstanding the difference in their ages, a strong affection grew up between the two, for Richard was a manly little fellow, and very devoted to the handsome young baronet.

It was many years since they had met, and it seemed a singular fate that had thus at last thrown them together again.

A physician was called to examine the injured foot, who said that the ankle was dislocated, a matter which he hoped a fortnight or three weeks would mend, if nothing happened, and he was careful.

During this time Richard spent a portion of every day

with his newly-discovered friend, and their intimacy was thus renewed and strengthened.

"What are you doing with yourself nowadays?" Sir Harold asked one day, after they had been talking over old times together.

He had noticed the settled sadness about his friend, and wondered at it in one so young and with such bright prospects as he knew were his.

"Nothing, save trying to kill time as rapidly as possible," Richard answered, moodily.

"How is this, Richard?" Sir Harold asked, searching his face. "Young men like you do not naturally become weary of life at your age. What is amiss with you, my friend?"

"Everything. Life is a blank to me, and the sooner I live out my days and drop into oblivion, the better I shall be satisfied," was the reckless response.

"Oblivion! Do you mean just that, Richard? Do you believe that oblivion comes with the end of life?" the baronet asked, very gravely.

"Do not you?" Richard returned, evasively, and fearing that he had inadvertently touched upon a disagreeable subject.

"No," Sir Harold replied, his face assuming an unwonted earnestness, and his eye lighting with some deep inward feeling, as he added: "I used to be as skeptical as any one regarding the future of man; I was willing to believe anything rather than the truth."

"What do you mean by 'the truth'?" Richard questioned, feeling some curiosity regarding his friend's religious views.

"That God made us *all* responsible beings. He exacts a loving obedience and loyalty to His every law, for which

He will reward every dutiful soul ; and will, on the other hand, just as surely chastise disobedience and treason ; there is no such thing as oblivion."

"And do you believe that punishment will be eternal?"

"Why not? If happiness is to be eternal for all who comply with God's requirements, why should not the reverse be true of those who scorn and neglect them? Every one contends that the holy cannot sin after death; how, then, can we expect the unholy to repent, when they disdained through life the same opportunities which others accepted? If the end of life fixes the state of one class for eternity, what right have we to believe that it will not also fix that of the other, since both have an equal chance to begin with?"

"What did you formerly believe?" Richard asked, as his friend paused.

He had not been in the habit of arguing such close questions as these; he did not feel at all easy at the turn the conversation had taken, and so asked others to save committing himself by a direct reply.

"I *used* to say to myself," Sir Harold continued, "'I am not responsible for my birth; God created me arbitrarily; I am not, therefore, responsible for my future. I did not ask to exist, I would prefer not to have existed, to suffer all the trouble and sorrow that has come upon me during my life, but, more than all, to be made answerable for the everlasting safety of my soul after it shall leave the body.' I rebelled continually at such a tyrannical state of things. I tried to believe in annihilation, but reason revolted against the idea. I then tried to believe the universal doctrine; it is such a comfortable theory, that, no matter how any one may live here—he may enjoy every pleasure, lawful or unlawful, commit any sin, take no thought regarding his

manner of living, go to any extreme—he will come out all right in the end—he will eventually be saved and allowed to enter heaven and share in all the pleasures of the blessed. Again, my reason told me that this would not be just—that those who had led a correct, self-denying, godly life on earth were entitled to a reward; if they had tried to comply with every divine requirement, they alone were fitted to share the bliss of heaven, which is the condition of obedience; while those who were undutiful and skeptical regarding all that is good and holy ought to pay the penalty of their folly. Good and evil are antagonistic principles even in this world, and they must of a necessity be so in the next. The good here have an inward consciousness that they stand acquitted before their Maker; the wicked are always in doubt and in a state of unrest and fear; they *know* that they are wrong, but they keep hoping that God (whom they should realize *cannot* change) will make an exception in their favor, and all will somehow be well with them at last. The good shun the wicked—the wicked shun the good in this world, and so it is natural to expect it will be hereafter. There is a familiar saying that oil and water *will* not mix, nothing can assimilate them, and so it is with good and evil.”

“And what has tended to change all your views upon this subject?” asked Richard.

“The life, precepts, and example of one of the sweetest and gentlest women on the earth. Shall I tell you how it came about, and something of my history during the past fourteen or sixteen years?”

“If you please—that is if it will not pain you to speak of it,” Richard returned, with a doubtful look, as he noted the shadow that had fallen on his friend’s face as he mentioned the past.

"It is a painful subject in some respects, but I would like you to know something of what my life has been," Sir Harold began, reflectively. "You know," he continued, "that after my marriage I lived abroad most of the time. For years we resided in Paris; my wife being of French descent, and her family living there, she preferred to remain there also. She was exceedingly fond of society, and imagined that it had many claims upon her. I would not cast any reflection upon the dead," the baronet said, with a heavy sigh, "for I believed my wife loved me, and was faithful to her family, perhaps, as it was possible for her to be under the circumstances; but, Richard, if you ever marry, do not choose a fashionable woman, for there can be no true, domestic happiness where a wife is absorbed in pleasure and interest outside her own home. A little daughter was given me during the first year of my married life, and I grew to idolize her, and strove in so far as I was able to bring her up according to my ideas of what a woman should be. She was a bright and lovely child until she was nine years of age, when a dreadful disease fastened upon her. She lay terribly ill for many months, and when she began to recover she was a hopeless cripple, while her disposition had become so warped and perverted it was perfect torture to live with her. This trial so wore upon my wife that her own health failed, and although every effort was made to save her, consumption did its deadly work, and she died. Thinking that a change might be beneficial to my child, I then returned to London, where I have remained ever since. I longed for my native country, though my many trials and every added year of my life were fast making a misanthrope of me, and tending to make me more and more skeptical regarding an 'All-wise Ruler,' and the 'chief end of man.' This state

of mind continued until about a year ago, when I advertised for the fortieth time, I should think, for a companion for Grace. We could keep no one long, for the child had the temper of a fury, and few were willing to be subject to it, even for the liberal salary that I offered. My advertisement was answered almost immediately by a young lady with the saddest though sweetest face I ever saw in my life. She *was* a lady, too, in every sense of the word, I saw at a glance, but with some heart-breaking trial to bear——”

“Her name! What was her name?” Richard Byrnholm demanded, suddenly, and interrupting his friend.

A young and lovely lady—one who had some great sorrow to bear—had come there about a year ago. That was about the time of the fatal marriage and Pearle’s flight. She was young and lovely, and nearly heart-broken. Perhaps he had at last found a clew to her hiding-place.

“Miss Melfert was the name upon the card which she gave me—Margaret Melfert. But why are you so eager to know?” Sir Harold queried, giving the young man a searching glance.

“Never mind. I am deeply interested in your story. Go on,” Richard returned, leaning back in his chair with a disappointed sigh, for there was no familiar sound in the name of “Melfert,” and there were hundreds of “Margarets” in the world.

“Well, this girl came into my household like some angel of mercy. From the first there appeared to be an almost magnetic power about her that subdued the evil spirit in my child, and before she had been in her presence twenty-four hours she had completely won her heart, and secured her respectful attention to her wishes. It was something marvelous! Day by day I watched her with anxiety, fearing that such a blessed state of things could

not last; but she was ever the same, sweet, gentle, patient, but ruling with a firm, wise hand. Of course I grew deeply interested in her; she won first my gratitude and then my love, until my heart bowed before her, as it never yet had bowed to a woman; and six months after she entered my family, I asked her to become my wife and a mother to the child she had so transformed. Imagine my astonishment and bitter disappointment when she told me my case was hopeless—that she was already a wife and her husband living.”

“Already a wife!” repeated Richard, with white lips, his very blood seeming to stagnate the words.

Something began to impress him that Margaret Melfert might after all be Margaret somebody else.

“Yes,” pursued Sir Harold, “and the wife of the ‘vilest wretch on earth from whom she had fled and was hiding.’”

Richard half suppressed a groan at this.

“What did you say, Richard?” his friend asked, turning to get a better view of his face; but it was turned toward the window and he could not see its expression.

“Nothing—go on,” he said, trying to speak naturally.

“There is but little more to tell,” the other resumed. “Of course I knew at once that I must relinquish every thought of what I had hoped and desired, though it was one of the greatest trials I had ever had to bear. She wished to go away at once, but that I could not consent to under any circumstances, and I finally persuaded her to remain. Very soon after this Grace sickened again, and the physician told me at once that I must entertain no hope of her recovery. I need not tell you that the world looked very dark before me again; that I was ready to ‘curse God and die’ also. Much of my time was necessarily spent in the sick-room, and there I began to realize

for the first time what life meant, and the responsibility resting upon every soul which God has created. The teachings that there fell from the lips of that wonderful woman, as she led my child, step by step, from earth to heaven, will never fade from my memory; her faith, her love, her gentleness and goodness, together with her invariable patience, are like green spots in the desert of my life. Through her I began to believe in a hereafter, and one that must be either all purity and blessedness, or dark and full of remorse; and when at length my Grace fell asleep, knowing that it was the last of earth for her, and believing that she would awake in a world where there would be no more pain or suffering, the vail of skepticism was torn from my eyes forever. I there learned what I owed to the One who had created me, and as I stood over my dead one, I vowed that the future should not be like the sinful, aimless past. I grieved for myself, not for the suffering, crippled child whom God had taken, for I knew it was better for her; and Miss Melfert, with a sympathy and gentleness that I never can forget, pointed out a future to me that could not be all darkness, no matter what befell me.

“ ‘Every bright and beautiful thing has been taken from my life, and I have only a broken and almost worthless future to give to a better service,’ I said, as we stood looking our last upon my little daughter, and she had been urging me to accept the faith in which she had died.

“ ‘My friend,’ she said, holding out her fair hand with sisterly frankness, ‘I know there has been much to apparently blight your life, but did you ever take flowers that were faded and place them in scalding water, first clipping their stems? It would seem,’ she went on without waiting for me to reply, ‘a very harsh, almost fatal way to treat

them, but the result is wonderful; they will almost immediately revive and brighten into nearly their former beauty. So *I* have come to feel that out of trials, that seem as if they must crush us to the earth, we can rise through God's love and help into a purer and better life than we have ever known. Sir Harold,' she continued, with crimson cheeks and drooping eyes, 'my own life was blighted, my heart broken, less than a year ago, but I was led to kiss the rod that smote me; and now, even though the future promises to be but an existence of loneliness, and toil, and isolation from kindred and friends, yet I feel that my life will be better, purer, and more acceptable in the end than it would have been if I had never known a sorrow.'

"She went away almost immediately, but this was the way, Richard, that I was led from rankest skepticism and rebellion against my Creator to accept 'the truth' and become, I hope, an obedient child."

"Pearle! oh, my lost Pearle!" groaned Richard Byrnholm, with a sob that shook his manly frame to its center.

He knew well enough from those last words of his friend, regarding "her life of toil, and loneliness, and isolation from kindred and friends," that he had been speaking of his lost bride—that *she* had been the "angel of mercy" who had brought peace to that stricken house.

CHAPTER XXX.

A FRUITLESS QUEST.

"Of whom are you speaking, Richard? What deep sorrow is preying upon your heart?" Sir Harold asked, much surprised at his companion's despairing cry.

Richard did not reply; the recital to which he had just listened, the thought that Pearle, his lost darling, had been there in that very house, perhaps in that very room, brought back all his wretchedness so forcibly that he was nearly unmanned.

"Trust an old friend, my boy, and unburden yourself to me," Sir Harold continued, kindly. "I have noticed from the first that you were unhappy from some cause or other—tell me what troubles you."

"Where is she now—my Pearle—this sweet woman of whom you have been telling me?" Richard asked, brokenly, and turning his haggard face toward his companion.

"Your Pearle! I do not understand you," Sir Harold said, with some surprise.

"Yes, she *was* mine—she *is* mine now, at heart. I know well enough that this woman of whom you have been telling me is the same one who was to have been my wife, but was snatched from me at the very moment that was to crown my happiness. Where is she now? Tell me! I must find her!" Richard cried, wildly.

"Richard, man, you are surely crazy! Whatever your trouble may have been, you must be mistaken in this. Miss Melfert could have been nothing to you, for she told me with her own lips that she was already a wife, and had fled from an unworthy husband," Sir Harold said, beginning to think the young man's sorrow had affected his brain.

"I know it is all true; but listen and I will relate to you a tale of such treachery as you have never dreamed of," he replied, sitting suddenly erect and bracing himself for the task.

He then told him all the story of his school days, of the friendship he had formed there, of his return to his home,

his meeting with Pearle, their engagement, their anticipated marriage, and the treason that had at the last moment robbed him of his bride. He told him all, withholding nothing save the name of the man who had betrayed him, and the face of his friend grew grave and sad with sympathy as he listened.

"Do you wonder," he said, bitterly, in conclusion, "that I am miserable and restless? Do you wonder that life seems a burden, or that I should desire something—*anything*—to steep my senses in forgetfulness, and ease my pain?"

"You have indeed been most severely tried," Sir Harold said, sympathetically, "and I am amazed at what you have told me. Can it be possible that Margaret Melfert, as she called herself, and your Pearle are one and the same? It must be so, for your description of her is exact, except that the brilliant beauty of which you speak has been toned down by sorrow into a pale loveliness that is indescribable."

"Do you know where she is now?" Richard asked again.

"No. She went to reside with a family a few miles out of town when she left me, and I have neither seen nor heard anything of her since. More than a month ago I sent her some fruit and flowers from my own hot-house, but the man returned with them, saying the house where they had lived was empty; so I suppose the family must have moved to some other place," returned the baronet.

"I must find her! I must see her, if only for once more, or I shall go mad with this suspense!" Richard cried, excitedly.

"My dear friend," said his companion, pityingly, "I fear you are very unwise in this matter. If you should succeed in finding her, what possible good would it do either of you? Would not such an event be disastrous to

her peace of mind, and cause you more suffering than you experience now? Let us look at the facts just as they are. She was legally wedded to that villain, and while he lives she can never be anything to you; for, unless I mistake her character very much, she could never be persuaded to consent to have that contract nullified, even if a petition for such a thing were successful. No; she went to the altar apparently of her own free will, and tacitly assented to those vows, and I do not believe that she would seek her own happiness at the expense of what she feels to be morally right."

"There was nothing morally right about it from beginning to end," Richard cried, much excited.

"No; not as you look at it, knowing all the circumstances; but the fact exists, notwithstanding. She *is* his wife, and must remain such while he lives; for I do not believe a divorce would ever be granted upon the conflicting evidence that would be brought to bear upon the case. Take my advice, Richard—do not seek her. She evidently desires to remain in obscurity, or she would have returned to her brother before this; and, believe me, the best balm for her own sore heart will be found in the good that she will surely accomplish wherever she may go."

"But what can I do? My life is utterly wrecked. If I could but find her, look once more in her face, hear her speak, and then die at her feet, it would be bliss compared with what I endure every day of my life now," groaned the unhappy lover.

"You must go to work, Richard—you must have some object in life. You have spent a whole year in aimless wandering and brooding over your troubles, and it has brought you nothing but misery. Emulate the example of the fair girl whom you profess to love. If she, a frail

woman, could rise above her grief—which surely must have been as hard for her to bear as for you—ought you not also strive to conquer a passion so hopeless?”

Richard made a gesture of pain and impatience at these words.

“Nay, bear with me, my boy,” returned his friend, gently; then he added, with a shadow on his handsome face: “I know something of what you suffer, for remember that we both have loved the same woman; but I have put that feeling entirely aside—it was one of the ‘thou shalt not have’ for me, and so I surrendered that when I surrendered my will to a higher authority. But, Richard, I cannot bear to see you wasting your life in useless repinings. I could not be more sorry for you if you were my own brother; and could I give you happiness, even to the restoring of your lost bride, I would gladly do it. You have said that you have nothing to do but to kill time as rapidly as possible. Now, I have a proposal to make to you.”

Richard sat up and looked at his friend with some interest at this.

Sir Harold’s calm, common-sense reasoning had done much toward restoring his self-control; while his allusion to his own hopeless attachment for Pearle, and his manly surrender of it, made Richard ashamed of his own weakness.

“I have a mission to perform,” the baronet continued, encouraged to see that he had gained his attention. “It is quite a disagreeable one, too, since it is involved in something of mystery, and I am going to ask your assistance in the matter.”

“I shall be very glad to give it—to help *you* in any way will give me pleasure, if anything will,” Richard returned,

with a sigh, but his tone was not quite as hopeless as when he had last spoken.

"Well, then, I shall take you at your word," the baronet replied, smiling. "I have a long journey before me, and, I expect, a trying search also. I am going to ask you to accompany me, to help while away the time, and to give me the benefit of your advice; but that you may understand what I have before me, I shall be obliged to relate a little family history to you. As I told you before, my wife was French. She was the only child of one of three brothers of the name of Renau. One of these brothers married and settled upon the homestead near Chalons; another went to seek his fortune in Australia; while the third—my wife's father—located in Paris, where he was very successful in business, and becoming interested in politics, at length grew to be quite a prominent statesman. When I married his daughter he settled a handsome dowry upon her, which would, of course, have fallen to Grace had she lived. The last dozen years of his life Monsieur Renau spent with us, and died only a few months after my wife, for whom he mourned continually. He left a will, dividing his property equally between his two brothers if they should be living, or among their heirs if they should be dead. He had heard nothing from either of them for a long time, and, owing to the state of his health, he was not able to visit the homestead, as he longed to do, to ascertain how they were getting on in the world. He made me the executor of his will, and in case no heirs can be found, the property is to revert to me. I do not need it, do not want it; in fact, I have plenty of my own to look after as it is, and I sincerely hope I may be able to find some one to inherit it. I have been to France once to search for the heirs. I visited the old homestead near

Chalons, but it was closed and deserted, and I could find no one who could tell me whither the family had gone. I learned that the master had died a year or so previous, and soon after the long-absent brother had returned from Australia, independently rich, and he also soon afterward died of small-pox. Two months later the family had disappeared, leaving no clew to their intended destination. I should have pursued my search further, but business of my own, and a reluctance to leave Grace long at a time, called me home. Since then I have had trouble and anxieties enough to keep me here. I have written several times making inquiries, and advertised in a number of papers for information regarding the missing ones; but all to no purpose. Now, however, having no domestic cares to keep me, I feel it my duty to institute a prolonged search, which I shall not abandon until I discover something definite. I need not tell you that I dread the unpromising task; it will doubtless be a long and weary one. Will you go with me to break the monotony?" Sir Harold asked, somewhat eagerly, in conclusion.

"Gladly! It will be something to do—something to think about beside myself," Richard returned, considerably animated; while neither gentleman had a suspicion of the strange things which their journey was to reveal to them.

At the end of four weeks from the time of his accident, Sir Harold's physician said it would be safe for him to travel; and, accordingly, accompanied by his friend, he at once proceeded to Chalons, which he had resolved to make his starting point in the search.

A week was occupied in reaching the city, where, after resting a day or two, they procured a carriage and drove out to what had once been a fine estate, but which, evi-

dently for the want of funds, had long been neglected and unimproved.

The old manor house was still closed, and it was only after repeated attempts and a prolonged search that the travelers found any one who knew aught of the family.

In a little cottage on the edge of a forest belonging to the estate, they finally stumbled upon an old man living alone, and Sir Harold began to have some hope that at last he might be able to learn something of the family.

The man said he had once been a servant in the family, and he appeared to take their fallen fortunes greatly to heart.

"Ah, monsieur," he said, sadly, "the fates were all against us. A curse is on the race. The land, so beautiful once, has all run out. The last of the Renaus is gone. Ah, me! ah, me! that I should live to see it!"

"Do you know what has become of Monsieur Renau's widow, and were there any children?" Sir Harold at last succeeded in asking, after a third attempt to gain the garrulous old man's attention.

"No, monsieur. After master and Monsieur Aleck died, no one was left but the mistress and Mademoiselle Alice, and they seemed like to die with grief and the other trouble that had come on them, and one night they went away, and no one ever knew where they went."

"And who was Mademoiselle Alice—a daughter?" demanded Sir Harold.

"Ay, monsieur."

"And what was the 'other trouble' that you referred to?"

"Alack! it was such as no man of pride could well bear. She ran away with a strange gallant, and came back,

after a year, with *la petite* in her arms," the old man said, shaking his head and wiping away a tear.

"Ah!" said Sir Harold, with a grave and troubled face.

"Ay, monsieur; and the trouble killed the proud master—he never looked up after it. The neighbors jeered and held aloof, because mademoiselle had been proud, too, and high-headed, and it seemed a good bone for them to suck, that grief should come to her. The master died before she came back—she did not even get to the funeral, but she stayed with the mistress after that, and the two clung together in their troubles. In a little while Monsieur Aleck came back from Australia. He was rich; he said he would restore the farm. The mistress and mademoiselle began to look cheerful and take heart once more. But the uncle sickened, and died with small-pox. He made a will, and Mademoiselle Alice was an heiress in spite of her shame, and people began to fawn and take notice once more of her. But she scorned them all; she grieved ever, and grew so restless and unhappy living here, that the mistress at last gave up to her, and they went away. They gave me money, but did not tell me they were going. I woke one day, and found them gone. I live here alone. I can tell no more;" and the old man sighed heavily.

"But did they not leave the place in care of some one?" asked his interlocutor.

"I cannot tell. Nobody comes here; I see no one. Perhaps the cure may know."

This was not much more aside from the revelation of Alice's shame than Sir Harold had learned upon his previous visit, and he began to fear he would never discover anything more satisfactory.

He was considerably mortified upon learning the story

of wrong and shame connected with the only living heir of the Renaus; and it was with less enthusiasm than he had ever experienced that he sought the cure of the parish to see if any further information could be gained.

Sir Harold had not thought of the cure when he was there before, and as he was an old resident, he might have considerable to tell, he reasoned.

The good man received his visitors courteously, and listened with great apparent interest while Sir Harold made known his errand.

"There has been deep trouble in that family, and there seems to be something of a mystery connected with it also," he said, in reply to the baronet. "It is even as the servant has already told you, and nearly every one in the parish believes in the story of shame. Some five or six years ago—yes, fully six it must be—there came a stranger into this neighborhood. He was out of health, he said, and had come here to spend his vacation and recruit. He was not long in making the acquaintance of the beautiful Alice Renau, who was accounted the loveliest girl in all the parish, though somewhat haughty and proud. She was often seen walking with this stranger, and people began to fear that all was not right, and warned her against him, for, try as they would, they could not discover who he was. Soon after, they both disappeared, and nothing was heard from them for more than a year. Her father took the sad event greatly to heart; he drooped, and died in less than twelve months from the time of his daughter's flight. A few months afterward Alice as suddenly re-appeared, bringing a beautiful, fair-haired, blue-eyed babe in her arms. I visited her, and tried to comfort her, for she was nearly heart-broken upon learning of her father's death, and that it was her conduct that had killed him. There seemed

some deeper sorrow on her mind, too; but she was very reticent regarding her life during her absence, though when I questioned her, she declared that she was a lawful wife, and showed me her wedding-ring, although she could produce no certificate of her marriage. She shunned all society, and never appeared to notice the slights and jeers of her former associates. But, one day, I called at their home; it was deserted; they had gone, and no one knew anything about their departure. This is all that any one knows of them, and the event seems to be surrounded with mystery."

"I am told that their circumstances pecuniarily were much improved during the last of their residence here," Sir Harold remarked, when the cure had concluded his story.

"Yes, monsieur. The long-absent brother of Monsieur Renau returned just after Miss Alice came back. He had acquired a handsome property, and proposed to do great things for the old place; but he also shortly died, and left all his fortune to the poor girl who had suffered so much, and of whom he appeared to be very fond."

"That knowledge is a great relief to my mind," answered Sir Harold; "for wherever the family may be, they doubtless have plenty of means; but I am deeply grieved to learn of the shadow that has fallen upon that young girl."

"It is a great misfortune, monsieur, for they were always very much respected before, and their daughter considered one of the brightest ornaments society had, notwithstanding that their means were limited," replied the cure, sadly.

Sir Harold and Richard took their departure, feeling as

if their errand had been almost fruitless, and deeply disappointed that they could learn no more.

"My search is cut short sooner than I expected, for I know not which way to turn now," the baronet said to Richard, after leaving the cure.

"I see nothing for you to do but to give it up for the present, and advertise largely, trusting to circumstances to reveal the hiding-place of those you seek. It is evident that, wherever they are, they do not wish their place of residence to be known," Richard returned.

"Do you feel in the mood for travel?" his friend asked, after a thoughtful silence.

"Yes; anything to pass the time," was the indifferent response.

"Then what say you to a trip to Strasburg? We are on the direct route, and we might spend a few days there both profitably and pleasantly."

"Very well; then to Strasburg we will go."

They repaired to the station, purchased their tickets, and were soon flying along the railway toward that ancient and noted city, and the surprising developments awaiting them.

"Thus helpless man, in ignorance sedate,
Rolls unconscious down the torrent of his fate."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE MARRIAGE RECORD.

They had taken an express train, and hoped to reach Strasburg some time during the night.

All went well until they reached Bar le Duc, where they

learned that a freight train had run off the track a few miles beyond, and this event would occasion several hours' delay.

"This is exceedingly uncomfortable, for if there is one thing I dislike more than another, it is waiting at a railway station," Sir Harold said, as he paced impatiently up and down the platform.

Not long after the inward-bound express came thundering up to the station, bringing the not very encouraging intelligence that the work on the wreck was progressing but slowly.

A few passengers alighted, and then the train moved on again.

One of the few who left the cars was a young and fine-looking man, the sight of whom caused Richard Byrnholm to start forward with an exclamation of surprise and pleasure.

The stranger was of medium height, of a rich, dark complexion, and resembled him in both face and figure, and appeared to be near the same age.

"Eugene, old fellow, how under the sun did you ever get here?" he demanded, clapping the new-comer upon his shoulder.

The young man started and turned quickly.

"Richard!" he cried, as greatly astonished as the other, while his white face lighted with pleasure, as he shook him heartily by the hand. "How did I get here?" he went on, laughing. "By the Paris express, as you must have seen; but what are *you* doing in Bar le Duc?"

"Waiting for the train to go on to Strasburg; the accident beyond is detaining us. But I thought you were in Rome."

"And so I was a fortnight ago; but I have good news

for you, Richie, boy—I have received an appointment at home, which will set me up wonderfully, and I shall no longer need to trespass upon your kindness——”

“Don’t mention it, Eugene,” Richard interrupted, with an uneasy glance at Sir Harold, who was standing near, and turning he immediately introduced him.

After explaining a little more fully the cause of their detention, Eugene Byrnholm—for the stranger proved to be a cousin of Richard’s—claimed their companionship.

“I have a little matter of business to attend to here,” he said, “after which we will look about the place. Bar le Duc has a number of attractions for pleasure-seekers.”

“When were you over here before?” Richard asked, in surprise.

“About four years ago,” the young man returned, his face growing instantly grave, almost sad.

“Come,” he added, linking his arm familiarly within that of his cousin, “I am now going to a pretty little church that I know you will like to see.”

Thus those three men turned and walked down the street, never suspecting what great events were hinged upon that apparently accidental meeting of the two cousins.

Eugene Byrnholm led them toward the town, which is situated upon a hill at some distance from the station.

At the foot of this hill there stands an ancient little church, densely overgrown with moss, ivy, and lichens, and seeming like some venerable patriarch beside the more modern dwellings which cluster around it.

“This church is very old, and was built long before the newer portion of the town on the hill was thought of,” Eugene explained, as they entered its wide-open door.

He then sought the sexton, and asked permission to look at the church records. It was of course granted.

The books were brought, and appearing to know just where to look for what he wanted, Eugene turned to a page, and copied into a little book that he had with him the record of a marriage in which his own name figured.

"Ah, I see," Richard said, smiling, as he comprehended what he was about. "Was it in Bar le Duc that that event occurred?"

"Yes; and I promised a certain little woman that when I returned I would bring a copy of the transaction with me. The original—the one that should have been hers—was lost, or forgotten, or something," Eugene replied, the shadow again on his face; then drawing his cousin a little one side he began to ply him with eager questions, while Sir Harold stood by the table listlessly turning the pages of the book he had just left.

Strange that he should have turned *backward* instead of forward!—and, as he thought of it afterward, all the events of that day were passing strange!

That he should have proposed going to Strasburg; that they should have been detained at Bar le Duc; that Eugene Byrnholm should have been returning to his native land just at this time, after three years of exile, and meeting them there, should have led them to that little church at the foot of the hill! it was almost marvelous!

But the finger of fate—the hand of Providence rather—led them there, and so he found that strange record, as he stood by the table in the vestry, and carelessly turned the leaves of the church books, while the cousins conversed of personal matters a few steps away.

Some one coming in at the door arrested his hand, or he would have turned that last leaf also, and never seen those names written there.

He glanced up, the leaf slipped from his fingers, his

hand dropped upon the page just below the fourth line from the top.

It was the cure who came in, and who, with a courteous bow to the strangers, passed on into the church to speak to the sexton.

Involuntarily Sir Harold's eyes fell again upon the page, and a shock like that caused by an electric battery shot through every fiber of his being, for there, right before him, written in clear but delicate characters, was the name of "Alice Marie Renau" while just above it, in a bold hand, was the name of another person—a man of whom he had heard, but never seen!

A startled cry escaped him, and he bent closer to read the record of a marriage that had occurred six years previous.

His cry attracted the attention of Richard Byrnholm, and he at once approached him.

"Have you also found something interesting there?" he asked.

For reply the baronet pointed to the record he had just read.

Richard's quick eye dropped upon the page.

One glance was sufficient. He dropped into a chair standing near, his strength all gone, every vestige of color forsaking his face, and even his lips.

"Merciful Heaven!" he cried, "can it be true? Do you know what it means?" and he shook like a reed.

Sir Harold thought his emotion greater than the occasion demanded, but he replied thoughtfully and very gravely:

"Yes; instead of shame and dishonor for the girl whom I have been seeking, it means a name and a place in the world worthy of her father's daughter, and I swear she

shall have it if I can find the man who wrote his name there above hers," he concluded, sternly.

"Give me the book. Let me look again. I may not have read those names aright; and oh! it would be too cruel to be deceived in this thing," Richard said, almost wildly, as he seized the church record and drew it toward him again.

Again he read the names that he had seen before, and then dropped his head upon the book, feeling weak as a little child, and nearer a state of unconsciousness than he had ever been in his life before.

"What ails you, Richard? Why should that record affect *you* thus?" demanded Sir Harold, regarding him, wonderingly.

He put his hand out as if the words had jarred upon him.

"Leave me alone for a few minutes, please. I am too completely upset to tell you anything now," he murmured, and respecting his request, but greatly surprised, Sir Harold went to seek the cure to question him about that marriage that had occurred six years before.

Yes, the good old man remembered the event perfectly. He never forgot a face that he had once seen, and he always noticed particularly those whom he married.

"Alice Marie Renau," he said, "was a delicate-looking girl, with hazel eyes and soft chestnut hair; while the man she had married was light, with cold, glittering eyes of a peculiar color, and a sinister smile about his thin lips. He was deeply grieved to hear such a sad tale of them, for the young girl had appeared devotedly attached to her lover," the cure resumed, after Sir Harold had related something of the circumstances that had transpired since. "But,"

he went on, "they had been legally married, and he would give him a writing to certify the fact."

This he did, and Sir Harold felt well repaid for the disappointment and annoyance that he had experienced at being detained at Bar le Duc by the accident.

Even should he never find Alice, he would yet have the satisfaction of being instrumental in removing the stigma from her name, and it should be his first duty to write to the cure of the little parish near Chalons, informing him of his discovery, and asking him to right the wrong that had been done the girl in the eyes of the public. He went back to Richard after learning this, and found him also copying the record, but with a hand that trembled so, that one would scarcely recognize his handwriting.

A fierce, lurid light was gleaming in his eyes, and his lips were so set as with some iron resolution, though his face was still deathly white.

"Are you ill, my boy?" his friend asked, startled by his haggard look.

"I believe so—I don't know—let us go home," he said, passing his hand wearily across his brow, and staggering to his feet.

"What has happened to disturb you so? Why should you talk of going home? I thought we were to go to Strasburg?" Sir Harold said, beginning to feel alarmed at both his looks and words.

Eugene came up at this moment, and Richard made a sign to the baronet to say nothing more; but his cousin also exclaimed at seeing him:

"Are you ill, Richard?"

"Yes, I believe I am, nearly. I feel as if I had been stunned; let us get out of this place; I cannot breathe

here," he returned impatiently, and turning he walked quickly from the place, followed by his two companions.

Instead of proceeding up the hill to take a glance at the town, as they had proposed doing, he strode briskly back toward the station, outstripping the others considerably, and when they reached the place, they found him purchasing a ticket back to Paris.

"What does this mean, Richard—are you not going to Strasburg?" Eugene Byrnholm asked, in surprise.

"No; I have changed my mind. I must go back—back to England once more," he said, excitedly, and turning to the agent, he asked how soon the train was due.

"In ten minutes?" was the welcome response.

Sir Harold regarded his young friend in perplexity. Something evidently terrible had upset him, and doubtless he would confide in him when the proper time arrived, so he conducted himself accordingly.

"If that is the case," he said, "I think we shall all go together, for of course I care nothing for the trip to Strasburg alone," and he, too, purchased a ticket for Paris.

Ten minutes later they were speeding back over the way they had but just come.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A SUDDEN SHOCK.

The three months following the disturbance in the school-room at Dunbarton Priory passed quietly, and even pleasantly. The lines of care and anxiety that had been occasioned by Miss Camilla's insolence and ill-treat-

ment, faded out of Pearle's face, after that young lady's withdrawal; she had no more headaches or heart-aches from that cause, and not unfrequently her sweet, clear laugh was heard ringing out at some comical prank of her pupils.

The children continued to improve rapidly, and grew to love their beautiful governess more and more. Francita also was very kind to her, and made such progress in her French and German, that she became an object of envy to her sister, who was not nearly as successful under her masters; and this of itself increased her dislike of Pearle.

"I hate her," she often said, after coming in contact with her; and so allowed no opportunity to pass to show her scorn and ill-will.

Meantime, Ambrose, the young heir, had returned to his home, and his cautious mother, warned by her suspicious daughter, banished the governess entirely from her drawing-room, and exerted all her powers to prevent her darling son from coming in contact with the strangely beautiful girl.

And strangely beautiful she was growing, too. It might have been the result of the quiet, peaceful life she was leading; it might have been the pure country air and living, but a great change was visible in Pearle.

She was gaining in flesh, and her form grew plump and beautifully developed; her cheeks, which at first had been hollow and very pale, became round and full and tinted with a lovely color; her eyes were gradually losing their anxious, hunted expression, and beginning to light up with something of their former brilliancy and sparkle. The sad, drooping lines about her mouth were fading out, her lips were a deep, rich scarlet, while smiles were no longer strangers to them.

There were sad hours and dark days for her, but despair

and rebellion had been driven forever from their throne in her heart, and they were not so frequent as they had been.

Her trust in an infinite wisdom was strong and steady; she knew there was some purpose in all this discipline, even though she might be obliged to walk in the dark for years without discovering what it was.

Whenever she grew sad and disheartened she always sought Amy, and the little fairy, with her innocent, gleeful prattle, would always drive her gloom away.

Her love for the child strengthened every day, for she was a winsome, affectionate elf, and clung to her kind protectress with a fondness almost amounting to reverence, that was remarkable in one so young.

It almost seemed as if she realized that Pearle had saved her from being thrown upon the cold charity of the world, and something of the obligation she owed her.

"Dear auntie—the *best* auntie that ever was—Amy loves you a thousand hearts' full," she would say, in her loving moments, while she caressed Pearle's soft cheek with her fairy fingers and nestled her bright head against her shoulder.

She dearly loved to build air-castles and plan the great things she would do when she was grown.

"When Amy is a lady," she would preface her stories, spreading out her skirts to their utmost extent, and raising herself upon the tips of her toes, as if to hasten the much-wished for day, "she will have such a fine, *fine* house, and auntie shall have the very biggest and prettiest room in it. She shall always wear a velvet dress, too, like Lady Fennelsea's, and beautiful shining things in her ears and on her fingers, and nobody shall *ever* make her cry or look sorry then."

"How are you going to manage all this?" Pearle would ask, much amused with her plans.

"Oh --it will come *somehow*," she answered, wrinkling up her forehead and assuming a reflective look ; and Pearle, though she knew it was only childish prattle and nonsense, was nevertheless infinitely comforted and soothed by it.

"If I have lost all that once made life so beautiful, I can never be very miserable while I have such a darling to love me," she would say ; and grateful for this morsel, she fulfilled her duties faithfully and patiently, striving to mark each day with some good deed done.

The spring melted into summer ; the hot days came on, and Lady Fennelsea began to talk of a trip to the cool, breezy hills of Scotland.

She owned a small villa among the Pentland Hills, not far from Edinburgh, where the family were in the habit of spending a few weeks of every year.

Accordingly, the first of July found them settled in the midst of such a scene of enchantment as Pearle had never seen before.

Lord Ambrose accompanied them at his mother's request, though previous to this it had not been easy to persuade him ; his excuse being that "those quarrelsome children annoyed him so."

But in spite of his mother's precautions he had met Pearle several times, and he had secretly resolved to meet her many times more.

Lady Fennelsea had been unusually gracious to her governess of late ; she could well afford to be gracious to any one who had succeeded in making such models of her heretofore unmanageable children, and she had kindly told her that Amy might make one of their party to the mountains, if she would allow her to share her room.

This the devoted girl was only too glad to do, and she grew positively radiant as she watched the child's delight during their journey to the Pentland Hills.

While here the children were only required to learn half lessons, and this merely to prevent their being idle and keep them in order. Amy was now admitted to the school-room, and she did not show herself the least intelligent of the trio by any means. Miss Francita, being older and more demure, was excused from duty entirely during this vacation.

One morning Lady Fennelsea informed the children that they were to have a holiday and a picnic in a grassy knoll on one of the hills near by, from which there was a beautiful view of Edinburgh and the surrounding country.

Miss Melfert and a servant were to accompany them; the former to keep them in order, the latter to convey camp-chairs, a hamper of good things, and to protect and wait upon them; while her ladyship partly promised that if she felt equal to the effort she and the Misses Fennelsea would join them during the afternoon and return with them.

Could her ladyship have known that her idolized son contemplated making one of their number also, she would not have settled herself for a quiet day with a new novel, with quite so much satisfaction as she did.

Lord Ambrose had taken his gun, and, accompanied by his dogs, had set out early in the morning, ostensibly to hunt, but in reality he had a sly project in his head, and was determined to be upon the ground before the picnickers should arrive.

The little company were in high spirits, and Pearle, under the influence of the bracing air and the freedom from care and restraint, found herself feeling very light-

hearted, and every now and then breaking forth into some sweet carol as she climbed the woodland path.

On reaching their destination the children cried out with delight, for it almost seemed as if some good fairy, aware of their anticipated pleasure, had been there before them, and especially prepared for their coming.

In the center of the knoll there had risen, as if by magic, a spacious booth or arbor made of young saplings cut down, their trunks sharpened and driven into the earth, while their tops were brought together and twined in the center.

Quantities of trailing vines and woodland flowers decorated this picturesque arrangement, while it was literally thatched with the loveliest full-blown Scotch heather.

"What a charming arbor!" exclaimed Pearle, participating in the children's delight. "I wonder what good fairy has done this?"

The "good fairy" suddenly made his appearance in the form of a broad-shouldered, stalwart young man, with a very red face, and clothing considerably the worse for its rough contact with bushes and briers.

"Ambrose! Brother Ambrose!" shouted Fred and Clara simultaneously.

Doffing his hat, and revealing a brow covered with perspiration, the young man made a low bow to Pearle, while he said, with a mixture of amusement and humility:

"The fairy was too clumsy to vanish into thin air upon hearing your voices, even if he had not been caught in the thicket and for the moment unable to release himself. However, I hope my humble efforts will be appreciated."

"It is very lovely—really quite artistic, my lord," Pearle said, demurely, while he watched the color, which his un-

expected appearance had occasioned, come and go on her cheek.

"It is perfectly beautiful! and it will be so delightful to eat our lunch in," said Clara, with a very bright face.

"My reward is ample," said her brother, patting her cheek, "and now," with an appealing glance at Pearle, "my agency in this matter having been discovered, and being also 'one of the children,' I do not see but that I may be permitted to claim my share of the holiday sport."

"Oh, do! do!" the children cried, dancing about him for joy, and delighted to find that their stately brother could descend from his dignity and feel an interest in their pleasures.

But the fair governess looked grave.

She knew that Lady Fennelsea would not approve of this arrangement—nay, that she would undoubtedly be very angry if she knew that the heir of Dunbarton Priory was spending the day and making merry with a poor governess.

But what could she do under the circumstances? The young man evidently intended to remain, and it would be entirely out of her province to interfere in any way.

"I will not fret," she said to herself, after a moment of thought. "I could in no way have either foreseen or prevented such an event; if his lordship desires to give his brother and sister pleasure, there is no reason that I know of why he should not do so. I will cast care to the winds to-day, and take the 'good the gods provide' as if I, too, were a child once more."

With this conclusion arrived at, she resolutely put aside every unpleasant thought, and entered heartily into the children's enjoyment of the day.

Lord Ambrose, with the assistance of the servant, arranged the camp-chairs within the arbor, and then invited

the weary company to be seated, which, after their long walk, they were glad to do.

"Do you approve of my morning's work, Miss Melfert?" the young man asked, with a mischievous sparkle in his eye, as he placed her chair opposite the entrance to the arbor, where she could command a delightful view.

He had noticed her grave look when he had spoken of remaining with them, and surmised its cause.

"I think you are a very successful architect," she returned, evasively, and glancing around the tasteful arbor. "This, surely, is a fitting bower for even Titania herself."

"Thanks. Now, pray, imagine yourself the queen of the fairies, and rest here, while I bring you a cooling draught from yonder limpid spring."

He gave her a laughing glance and bowing low before her, darted away.

He was back again in less than five minutes, bearing a silver cup filled to the brim with cool, sparkling water which, bending upon one knee, in mock reverence before her, he presented to her, saying:

"It is fitting thus to serve the queen."

Pearle made a gesture of disapproval at his position; but, after quaffing the cooling drink, she, smilingly, though with heightened color, commanded him to serve her retinue in the same manner, which he, obedient to the letter, proceeded to do.

A half-hour was spent in resting, after which they had games and stories for another hour, and then it was time to begin to think about the good things in the hamper. A spotless damask cloth was spread down in the center of the arbor, and Pearle proceeded to arrange with dainty care the many delicacies which Lady Fennelsea had ordered to be prepared for them.

Lord Ambrose watched her for a few moments, then, declaring that such a feast should be decked with Flora's richest offering, he set forth with the children to see what treasures they could find.

Before Pearle had quite completed her arrangements they all returned, with hands full, and his lordship with his deft fingers fashioned a dainty bouquet to lay before each plate.

Never had there been a more delicious lunch, or one partaken of with keener relish; never had the children's faces been brighter, nor their voices merrier, their hearts happier; while Ambrose Fennelsea thought that no fairy queen could be more lovely than Pearle was as she sat opposite him, her face flushed and radiant, her eyes sparkling as they had not done before since the happy days at Ashton Manor, and looking like a floral queen, with a wreath of blue-bells, which Clara had fondly twined for her, resting upon her rich brown hair, and contrasting beautifully with the pure white of her brow.

They lingered long over the tempting viands, making the clear air ring with their merriment, for the heir of Dunbarton Priory made himself very entertaining, and Fred and Clara found themselves wondering why they had not discovered before that their brother was so delightful.

After lunch had been disposed of, they begged that they might be allowed to fish for awhile on the margin of a small lake at the foot of the hill, and the young man, desirous that the day should be satisfactory in every respect, assented.

Pearle said she would remain in the arbor, as Amy was tired, and she preferred to rest for awhile. Besides, the fragments of the feast and the dishes must be gathered up, and she would stay to superintend it.

So they departed without her, and, after assisting the servant to repack the hamper, and bidding him join the fishing party if he liked, she spread a shawl upon a heap of boughs and vines at one side of the arbor, and tempted Amy to lie down for awhile.

The child, nothing loth, dropped upon the fragrant bed with a sigh of content, and was soon fast asleep.

Pearle, glad to be quiet for a little while, sat down upon the ground beside her, and drawing a little volume of poems from her pocket, she made a table of a camp-chair and was soon absorbed in the contents of her book.

The solitude of the place, the soft, balmy air, the sweet trilling of the birds in the tops of the trees, the drowsy hum of the bees that had been attracted by the accumulated flowers and the crumbs from the feast, the effort to read after the unusual relaxation and enjoyment of the day, gradually overcame Pearle; her eyelids grew heavy, a delicious sense of peace and rest stole over her, her head drooped slowly, until it rested upon her arm on the camp-chair, her eyes closed, and she, too, slept.

She made a picture passing fair. No painter upon his canvas ever caught such sweet repose,

"And ne'er did Grecian chisel trace
A nymph, a naiad, or a grace
Of finer form or lovelier face."

Sleeping thus, she dreamed a strange, suggestive dream. She thought she was climbing what appeared to be an interminable ladder, and every round that she ascended some evil was overcome, some trouble and sorrow was left behind. Onward and upward she went, without the power to turn back, until she had accomplished what seemed to be miles and miles of the toilsome way.

She glanced below into the depths from which she had

climbed, and shuddered. What a weary way! How much of ill I have passed through! How dark, and dreary, and toilsome the ascent! she seemed to say. Then turning her eyes above, she saw that at every step the way grew brighter, until the top of the ladder was lost in a halo of golden glory, while just beyond the misty veil she thought she saw a brilliant crown suspended.

“Shall I ever reach it?” she asked. “Can it be for me? Shall I ever rest in such brightness and glory as that?”

In her longing and eagerness she seemed to forget where she was; she let go her hold upon the sides of the ladder, reaching up her hands as if to seize upon what she saw. A sudden dizziness overcame her, she lost her footing, and fell down, down into the depths and darkness below.

A sudden shock, a thrill of keenest pain, and she was broad awake, to find a strangely familiar face bending over her. A sinister smile curved the cruel lips, a fierce, lurid light gleamed in the cold, steel-like eyes that were eagerly searching her countenance.

A light, mocking laugh rang out on the still air as her lids flew open, and the sound made her shiver with a deadly dread.

“Aha, my bonny bride, I have found you at last!” were the triumphant words that greeted her ringing ears, in tones of almost diabolical glee, as she lifted her head and stared at him in horrified silence.

The face was the face of Adison Cheetham!

The voice that of her loathed and hated husband!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A CRY FOR HELP.

Astonishment and dismay rendered her utterly speechless; she could only look the loathing and terror that she could not utter.

"A pretty chase you have given your devoted husband, madam," Adison Cheetham continued, growing stern, his eyes fastened with a cruel glance upon her blanched but faultlessly beautiful face; "but," he added, with a hiss, "I have cornered you at last."

At the word "husband," Pearle had sprung, as if electrified, to her feet, and now stood haughtily, though silently, confronting him.

"Have you no welcome for the partner of your joys?" he sneered, chafing beneath her scornful glance, yet wildly longing to clasp her in his arms and rain passionate kisses upon the face that never had looked more lovely to him than now. "Have you no greeting for me, I say?" he went on, flushing angrily. "Is this the way you fulfill the obligations that you voluntarily took upon yourself more than a year ago? Is this your idea of the duty of a wife toward her husband? By Heaven! you try my patience beyond endurance—*will* you speak?"

"Yes, once for all," Pearle answered, in tones so cold and passionless that they made him shiver. "I am *no* wife to you save in name; I *never* took the vows of a wife upon me; I acknowledge no duties toward you; no obligations bind me, no vow of mine requires fulfillment. I

am to you as if I were dead—I would I *had* died before I ever saw you, for by you my life was accursed. I have no bright thing to hope for in the world, no joy this side the grave. Your vile treachery crushed me, deprived me of all I had—love, home, kindred, and friends; and I fled from you as I would flee from an evil spirit, hoping that I might hide from you until death should kindly release me from my misery.”

Her words tortured him almost to madness.

“Did you think you could evade me long? I *vowed* I would find you,” he said, fiercely; then suddenly changing his tone, he cried, wistfully: “Pearle, my beautiful one, your words are like two-edged daggers to me. I would sell my soul for one word of kindness and love from you.”

“Do not be profane,” she answered, with a gesture of displeasure. “Your soul belongs to your Maker, and will one day be required of you; see to it that you do *not* lose it eternally.”

Her reproof awed him for the moment, and he stood looking into her grave, sad eyes, and wishing that he was a better man—wishing that he was worthy of this proud, pure woman’s love. But the thought uppermost in his mind re-asserted itself.

“Pearle,” he began, trying to speak calmly, even gently, “do you not see that you are reasoning falsely? You say that you are no wife of mine—that you owe me no duty, no obligation. You cannot truthfully say that, when you stood up, in the face and eyes of hundreds, and was legally wedded to me.”

“Yes,” she returned, with a curl of her delicate lips; “I suppose, according to the strict letter of the law, in the eyes of the world you would be justified in claiming me as your wife. But *you* know, and *I* know, all the base

treachery which you employed to bring such an event about. You know that you *forced* me to the measure you desired; you drove me to sacrifice myself to save the honor of one who was dearer than either my own happiness or life. But, in the sight of Heaven, I am no more your wife than Queen Victoria is, and I would not perjure my soul by assuming relations so false and revolting, so hateful to every element of my nature. I would sooner forfeit my life than be obliged to dwell in the same house or eat at the same table with you."

A bitter oath burst from the man's lips, which were perfectly livid with pain and passion, as she concluded.

Every word that she had uttered had been like a blow from a hot iron upon his heart; for however hardened and degraded the character of Adison Cheetham might be, in this thing he was sincere—he loved this beautiful woman with a passion amounting to idolatry.

He checked the oath ere it was fully uttered, and said, in low, intense tones:

"Pearle, you drive me to desperation; but you can never dream of one-half the love, the wild *worship* there is in my heart for you."

"True love seldom works the destruction of its object," she answered, coldly.

"I know—I can see now that I was wrong. I was selfish to make you suffer so; but I did not stop to consider that then," he cried, his voice quivering with the intensity of his emotion; "but," he added, pleadingly, "the die is cast, the evil has been done, and shall not we make the best of it? Come with me, my darling, and let me, by my devotion to you in the future, prove the love I bear you. I will give up my whole life to your service. I will spare nothing; no effort shall be too great or wearisome

that will bring you happiness. I will be your abject slave, only give me the light and encouragement of your presence. Pearle, *will* you go home with me to Pelham Pines?"

"Never!" she answered, with flashing eyes and head uplifted, with haughty disdain. "It is true," she continued, with intense sarcasm, "as you say, that the 'die is cast,' the 'evil has been done,' and I have been trying to 'make the best of it' ever since that fatal day. The 'best' consisted only in my flying from your presence, and hiding myself from every familiar eye, and in filling my life so full of work and care that I would have no time to brood over my miserable folly. But it is useless to prolong this interview. I never could go with you to Pelham Pines, nor anywhere else; and the only favor I would ask of you is to leave me in peace."

"Will nothing move you?" he asked, with flushed face and quivering tones.

"Nothing," she returned, firmly but coldly.

Her quiet persistence, her calm, proud, and scornful indifference, aroused all the demon within him.

"You *will* not!" he cried, his eyes glittering like coals of fire. "I swear that you *shall* go with me. If I cannot win you to go with me peaceably, I shall forcibly claim you. I have been subjected to mortification and vexation enough on your account. You owe me obedience and submission upon this point, and I demand them from you. When I leave this place, you, madam, will go with me."

He had grown very white while he was speaking, and there was a look of desperation and settled purpose on his face that made Pearle's heart beat quickly.

He reached out his hand as he concluded and took her

hat from the bough where she had tied it, and approached her with it.

With her slender form almost majestically erect, and her fine gray eyes blazing dangerously, she retreated a pace or two as he advanced.

"Do you think that I am a timid child to be frightened into yielding you blind obedience?" she asked, with stinging emphasis. "It is the greatest mystery in the world to me how I could have been so duped by you in the beginning—to be led on, as I was, to my own destruction, and to ruin the happiness and life of the man that I loved. Ah, yes; that was it," she went on, excitedly, and clasping her hands with a gesture of bitter pain; "I loved blindly, so blindly that I lacked the power to reason, or you never could have cheated me as you did."

"The man you loved so blindly! Do you brave me thus? Do you, *my wife*, dare stand there and taunt me with your illicit affection for Richard Byrnholm? I warn you not to tempt me too far. I would see you both dead at my feet before he should ever triumph over me," Adison Cheetham hissed, with a chalk-like face.

"In that case you would but outwit yourself, since we should the sooner be re-united," Pearle retorted, undauntedly, but with exceeding bitterness.

This wretch, with his almost diabolical hatred of her lover, stung her into momentary madness, or she would not have allowed herself to take any notice of his extravagant threat.

"Curse you! I swear that I will yet break your proud spirit," he cried, trembling with rage, and striding toward her.

"Stop!" she cried, in clear, decisive tones.

She did not move, but stood still within the reach of

his arm, her eyes fixed full and steadily upon him as she spoke.

He could not bear her pure, honest gaze. He stared at her with impotent fury, but he dare not touch her, weak, slender girl though she was.

“You may as well rave at the winds, and thus seek to change their course, as to imagine that you can move me in this purpose,” she said, in low, inflexible tones. “No power on earth can compel me to go with you—*you*, least of all. I do not wish to make my misery public; I have no desire to give the world cause for further scandal; and though, after my willful folly, I could not feel that I was morally freed from you under any circumstances save death, yet, if you persist in this persecution, I shall seek the protection of the law against your abuse, for, I repeat it, go with you I *will not*—live in your hated presence, *never*; and now the sooner you leave me in peace, the better for both of us.”

He saw that she never would relent, that she loathed and despised him for the wretch that he was, and a feeling of despair began to settle down upon him.

Still he was determined he would not yield his point. She was his wife; she was for the moment in his power, and he had made up his mind that she should go with him to his home.

But some spell seemed to be upon him, as he stood there beneath the firm, steady gleam of her glorious eyes, and, for the time, he could only stand and gaze silently upon her.

“Auntie, auntie! send the bad man away—Amy’s afraid.”

The childish voice, sweet and clear, yet with a note of

fear in it, broke the strange silence that had followed Pearle's spirited speech.

With a violent start, Adison Cheetham turned quickly toward the sound.

He had seen that there was a child sleeping within the arbor when he first entered, but all his interest centering in Pearle, he had not bestowed a second thought upon the fact.

Amy had been aroused soon after his entrance by the sound of their voices, and raising herself upon her hands from the fragrant bed, she had been silently and wonderingly watching them, until she saw the man angrily approaching Pearle, and heard her eager, defiant words, when she cried out to her to send him away.

Something in the little flushed face seemed to rivet his attention, and he bent a startled, searching look upon it.

"Whose child is that?" he demanded, in repressed tones.

Amy, shrinking from his gaze, sprang suddenly to her feet and darted into Pearle's arms, and, strange to say, both felt a sense of protection at this change of position. His glance followed her, with a puzzled expression.

"Where have I seen her before?" he muttered; then, with sudden remembrance, he asked: "Ah! was that you sitting upon that rock by the river that day when I talked with her by the roadside?"

"Yes, that was I," Pearle answered; and she could not prevent the little curl of triumph that came to her lip at the recollection.

Again he swore. That he should have been so near her, and yet she should have escaped him, was humiliating, to say the least.

But his eyes, as if drawn by some magnetic influence, again sought the little one's face.

"Amy—Amy she said her name is," he murmured, musingly, while his brow grew dark and lowering, as if he was troubled by some unpleasant thought. "Whose child is she?" he again demanded.

"I am auntie's child," Amy answered, pertly, and with a frown and a pout at the intruder.

"Auntie! Why does she call you that?" he asked of Pearle.

"Because I have taught her to do so," Pearle answered, coldly.

"What is she to you?" he asked, eagerly. "Does she belong in the family where you are teaching?"

"No; she is nothing to them. She belongs to me now."

"To you! How so? Where did you find her?" and Adison Cheetham drew nearer still, studying the fair little face of the child.

Pearle frowned, but quietly returned:

"Her mother is dead; she had no father, no friends; she was alone in the world, and I took her."

"You adopted her?" he asked, almost breathlessly.

"Yes; but what can it matter to you?" Pearle asked, wearily, for the excitement of the last few moments was beginning to tell upon her strength.

He looked from her to the child she still held tightly clasped in her arms. There was a strange light in his eyes, a strange quiver about his lips, which had grown white again, as if under some intense inward emotion. Then he bent nearer the fair girl, and said, in a hoarse, excited whisper:

"Come, you must go with me; and—and the child can go too, if you wish."

"I told you I would never go with you," she answered, sternly and impatiently.

"But you *must*, my charming wife; and it will be very pleasant to have a little one—such a beautiful little fairy, too—prattling around the house;" and he laughed nervously as he said it.

"Go away," cried Amy, throwing out her little fat white hand at him angrily.

Again he laughed, and Pearle wondered at it, it was such a forced, unnatural laugh.

"Softly, little one," he said. "Your auntie doesn't teach you very good manners, I'm afraid. You are not very polite when you address gentlemen." He evidently had not forgotten his former interview with her. "But come," he added, authoritatively, "I have a carriage at the foot of the hill. I found you out several days ago, and I have been waiting for a favorable moment like this ever since."

He laid his hand rudely on Pearle's arm as he spoke. A fierce, defiant light leaped into her eyes—a light that cowed him in spite of his hardihood.

"Release me," she commanded, speaking under her breath; while Amy, uttering a smothered cry of terror, clung tremblingly to her neck.

"Yes, if you will go quietly with me," he answered, avoiding her blazing eyes.

"I will not."

"Then I shall be obliged to force you to do as I wish," and his grip tightened.

"Take the consequences, then," she said, and throwing back her proud head, she called in tones that went ringing

over the hills like the sound of a trumpet: "Lord Fennelsea—*help!*"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A DREAM DISPELLED.

Help was near at hand, and came swiftly to the rescue. A spring, a bound, a crashing through the leafy boughs behind them, a bold stroke from the shoulder, and Adison Cheetham measured his length upon the ground at Pearle's feet in less time than it takes to tell it; while the fair girl, losing all her strength, now that the danger which had menaced her had passed, sank weakly upon a camp-chair, trembling in every limb, and vainly trying to hush poor frightened Amy's sobs.

"Miss Melfert, what is the meaning of this? What has the wretch been saying to you?" Ambrose Fennelsea asked, searching her pale face, anxiously. "How you tremble! He must have frightened you terribly," he added, as she could not at that moment find voice to reply. "I was returning for an extra line and hook that I left in my game-basket," he went on, to explain how he happened to be there. "I was half way up the hill when I saw this person talking with you. Then I saw him lay his hand upon your arm, and appear to threaten you, and I hastened forward as quietly as I could in order not to attract his attention. I had nearly reached the arbor when you called for help. Who is he, and what does he want? Did you ever see him before?" and he cast a look of withering contempt upon the fallen hero.

Ere Pearle could reply, Adison Cheetham gathered himself and his scattered senses together, and rose to his feet, somewhat crest-fallen to have been so humiliated, but in a towering passion.

He drew his card-case from an inner pocket, and deliberately producing a card, handed it to his antagonist.

"I am at your service, my Lord Fennelsea, and we will settle for this insult in a more satisfactory manner at some future time," he said, with an ugly curl of his lips, while his blazing eyes seemed literally starting from his pallid face.

"'Adison Cheetham, Pelham Pines, Aylesbury, Bucks County,'" his lordship read aloud, in sarcastic tones, and with a sneer upon his handsome face. "Cheetham," he repeated; "ugh! a name worthy the man. I'm afraid I shall settle *you* rather more satisfactorily to myself unless you take yourself out of this lady's presence immediately," he concluded, sternly.

"A little more moderation in your speech, if you please, my lord," Adison Cheetham said, coolly, as he brushed the dust and sticks from his clothing. "Perhaps," he added, with an angry glance at Pearle, "you are not aware who this lady is yourself?"

"I am perfectly; and I would advise you to make yourself 'scarce' instantly, unless you desire another application of this good right arm of mine," the young man returned, loftily, and the tender, protecting look he cast upon Pearle told plainly that he was prepared to do battle most valiantly for her.

"She is *my wife*!" Adison Cheetham said, with the suddenness of a thunderclap, and paying no heed to the young lord's threat. "Allow me to introduce your lordship to

Mrs. Adison Cheetham, of Pelham Pines, Aylesbury, Bucks County."

Ambrose Fennelsea looked at him aghast for one instant, then turned a startled, almost despairing look upon the fair woman sitting there with bowed head and pallid face.

That one look into her pained, convulsed face convinced him of the truth of what he had heard; but it was altogether too bitter and sudden to be calmly borne, and before he was aware of what he was saying, he cried out:

"Good heavens! Margaret, *tell* me that the villain *lies*."

He staggered toward her, pale to the lips.

A vivid crimson shot over brow, cheek, and neck, and, with a low moan of pain, Pearle bowed her face upon Amy's golden head, feeling as if, wherever she went, she was doomed to carry misery with her.

"It strikes me that it would be well for you to have a care how you address Mrs. Cheetham in the presence of her husband," the irate man said, a sullen fire in his eye.

"Miss Melfert, *what* does he mean by this insolence? I *cannot* believe—it cannot be true that——" Lord Fennelsea began, almost imploringly.

"Yes—that is right—ask *her* if her name is not Mrs. Adison Cheetham," interrupted the wretch, taking a sullen pleasure in torturing her with the hated sound.

"You will have to *prove* what you say before I shall believe it. I will not insult her by questioning her upon the subject," the young man answered, sternly.

"That I shall be most happy to do, my lord," was the mocking retort, and drawing a large wallet from his breast, he took a folded paper from it, and handed it to him, with a low bow.

Almost mechanically he took and unfolded it. It was

their marriage certificate, and a dizziness seized him, a mist seemed to cloud his vision, as he read the names of Adison Cheetham, of Pelham Pines, and Margaret Radcliffe, with the date of their marriage plainly written there.

He uttered a cry of astonishment as he comprehended the meaning of it.

"Are *you* Miss Radcliffe?" he asked, turning eagerly to Pearle.

She lifted her face, which was white and quivering now.

"Yes," she said, brokenly; "I am—or *was*—Margaret Radcliffe."

"I have heard of you—I have heard something of this wretched marriage, and the circumstances connected with it. And did you really fly from the miscreant who wronged you so deeply?" he asked, his face full of deepest sympathy for her.

"Yes; and, oh! I thought that I had at last succeeded in eluding him—I thought that I had found a pleasant and permanent hiding-place; but it is all over now, and I must go," she answered, wearily.

"You do not mean that you will go with him!" Lord Ambrose whispered, bending down to her.

"Never!" she replied, firmly, with a proud uplifting of her bright head.

"Shall I send him away?"

"Yes, yes, do; I cannot bear much more—save me from him if you can," she breathed, eagerly.

It was enough; he would save her at any cost after that beseeching, dependent appeal.

He turned resolutely upon the interloper, and handed back the certificate.

"You can go," he said, curtly, and the look on his face

betrayed his purpose. He never should take Pearle with him.

Adison Cheetham bowed in derision.

"Thank you for the permission," he said, but he did not move from where he stood.

"Very well," Lord Fennelsea said, indifferently, as he saw he had no intention of going, "it will not make any material difference, whether *we* or *you* leave the place. At this lady's request I shall give her my protection; she refuses to accompany you, and I warn you not to molest her, nor repeat the insolence of to-day, unless you court severer chastisement than you have received already."

Adison Cheetham advanced toward the dauntless man with a dangerous gleam in his eyes, while his right hand stealthily sought his left breast-pocket.

Lord Fennelsea saw the movement, but no shadow of fear was visible on his noble face.

"Gustave," he called, as he saw the servant approaching, and Adison Cheetham started guiltily; he had not thought that any one else was near; "Gustave, go and find Master Fred and Miss Clara, and tell them we are ready to return home. We will walk slowly down the south path, and you can follow with them. Miss Melfert, here is your hat and shawl; I will attend to Miss Amy."

Ignoring entirely the crest-fallen man, who stood by watching them in impotent rage, and not knowing what course to pursue, the young lord took the child from Pearle's unresisting arms, pinned the little linen cape over her shoulders, and tied the dainty gipsy hat over her sunny curls; then, offering his arm to Miss Melfert, he led her quietly from the place without deigning even a glance at his vanquished foe.

Adison Cheetham stood still and watched them pass

down the hill out of sight ; then with bitter imprecations upon both his haughty wife and her valiant protector, he also turned and went away.

Pearle allowed her companion to lead her down the rough mountain path, until they reached a tiny stream, where, at the foot of a tree, there was a large bowlder.

"Please let me rest here until the children come," she said, in a weak voice.

"You are faint ; you are trembling," he said, in tones of alarm, as he looked into her colorless face ; and he gently seated her upon the rock, then dashed to the brook and filled his mug with water.

"Thank you," she said, when he came back, and pouring some of it into her hand she bathed her forehead, for she was indeed faint and trembling, and fearfully unstrung.

"He has frightened you terribly ; I ought to have known better than to have left you alone," the young man said, in self-reproachful tones.

"It must have come sooner or later," Pearle said, beginning to recover herself ; "he had found me out ; he said he had been waiting his opportunity, and he might have come upon me when there was no one near to come to my help. I thank you very much for your kindness and protection, and since my secret is discovered, there is no longer any use in concealment. I am, as he told you, that man's unfortunate wife. I thought, however, that I had so effectually eluded him that he would give up his search for me, and I had really begun to feel safe and something of content ; but it seems he has tracked me even here. You say, my lord, that you knew something of the sad circumstances which forced me into the position I now occupy ?" she concluded, questioningly, longing to

know how he had gained this information, and just how much he knew.

"Yes, a friend heard an account of the whole affair from a person who was present at the church, on your—on the day that it occurred; and my only wonder is why Captain Byrnholm did not shoot the treacherous villain on the spot," the young lord said, indignantly, then catching sight of her quivering lips, he cried, remorsefully: "Forgive me; I wound you by recalling that sad time. Let me take you home at once, Miss Melfert, where you can rest and recover from the shock you have received; the children will do well enough with Gustave."

But Pearle shook her head at this kind offer.

"No; Lady Fennelsea trusted them with me, and I must not leave them. But—but how will all this be explained to her ladyship?" and the poor girl looked deeply distressed again.

Her companion also looked grave, and did not reply at once. At last he said, gently:

"Why need it be explained at all, Miss Melfert? No one save you and I know anything of this strange meeting, excepting Amy, and she of course cannot understand it."

"Gustave——" she faltered.

"Saw nothing—heard nothing! He appeared in sight just in season to show the villain that it would not be safe for him to adopt any extreme measures, as he was contemplating doing. So, if you like, the matter shall remain a profound secret between you and me, and I give you my word never to refer to it again unless I can in some way be of service to you."

How noble he appeared to her as he tried thus to comfort and re-assure her—so different from his haughty, ill-bred

sister—and a glow of gratitude pervaded Pearle's heart at his consideration for her.

"You are very kind," she said, "but I am afraid I shall be obliged to resign my position as governess in your family, and some explanation will be necessary."

"Resign your position! Margaret! No, you must not do that!" he cried, excitedly. "What would my mother do without you? and I—I could not *bear* to have you go away now——"

He stopped suddenly and in dismay. He had not been conscious of what he was saying until the vivid scarlet upon his fair companion's face and the haughty uplifting of her small head brought him to himself.

"Forgive me," he pleaded, humbly, his own face crimson. "I did not realize how I was speaking—I will never offend you again, only do not think of going away—unless, indeed, you intend returning to the protection of your own friends."

"I do not intend to do that," she answered, with drooping eyes.

She could not meet his look. Twice he had called her Margaret in such tones that there was no mistaking his feelings toward her, and she felt inexpressibly miserable over the knowledge of his love for her.

"Then do not think of leaving my mother, nor the children—they are very fond of you, and would grieve bitterly over the thought of a separation; the good that you have done them cannot be estimated, and if you intend still being a governess, I pray you give them the benefit of your services."

"But *he* will persecute me here; knowing where I am, he will leave no stone unturned to bend me to his will and accomplish his purpose, that I shall go with him to Pelham

Pines," Pearle said, with a shudder, and a troubled glance over her shoulder, as if she feared her irate husband might even then be pursuing her.

"Do not fear; you shall be protected from everything disagreeable. My mother was speaking only yesterday of hastening her departure for the Continent. I shall advise it, and you shall go with her; thus you will escape what you so much fear—he will not find you there."

"But," she began, doubtfully.

"I know of what you are thinking," he interrupted. "That my mother does not contemplate taking the children with her, and—" he hesitated and colored deeply—"you fear it may not be best for you to go."

Her eyes fell again, and once more the crimson tide rushed over her face. How well he read her thoughts!

"But you are mistaken," he continued, very rapidly, though his lips trembled slightly, "it will be the very wisest course for you to pursue, and my mother does intend to take the children with her, and you also, that she may avail herself of your knowledge of the languages. I alone of all the family am to remain at home, as there are important matters demanding my attention both in London and at the Priory."

Pearle was much surprised at this intelligence. She had supposed until this moment that he was to accompany the family abroad, and she had shrunk, after the developments of to-day and the betrayal of his own sentiments regarding her, from remaining longer in the family where she would be daily in his presence.

She knew that Lady Fennelsea and Miss Camilla would scorn her if they dreamed of the confidence that had to-day been established between herself and the idolized heir of Dunbarton Priory, and that they would be the first to turn

the cold shoulder upon her if they should learn of her misfortunes, unless she should acknowledge herself as the unfortunate Margaret Radcliffe, of Ashton Manor; and that she could not do—she could not bear to be *known* and *pitied*.

But if Lord Fennelsea was not intending to accompany his mother abroad—if she could be freed from the fear that he would cherish his hopeless attachment for her and betray it to them, she could see no reason why she should not remain as governess to the children, and accompany them, if she could be permitted to take Amy also.

“But who will attend Lady Fennelsea and the young ladies upon their travels, if *you* do not accompany them?” she asked, with a troubled countenance.

It had occurred to her that it would not be proper for them to travel unattended.

“That is all arranged,” he said, smiling, though he colored again. “Sir William Warner and his wife will join them, and they will make a merry party, I assure you. I shall not be needed, and I have business at home.”

Pearle did not feel exactly satisfied with this reply. She feared that too much was being yielded in order to make her feel comfortable; but she could not put the thought into words.

“I am afraid Lady Fennelsea would be very much displeased with me if she ever discovered that we—I have kept the occurrence of to-day a secret from her,” she said, thoughtfully.

The young lord had no doubt about the matter; but he was determined that his mother should *not* know anything about it if he could help it; and he was just as determined that Pearle should be shielded and protected from the villain who was her husband.

"What possible harm can there be in keeping it for the future, more than there has been in the past?" he asked, smiling. "It really is no more of a secret to my mother now than it has been; and as for myself, if your uneasiness is on my account, pray do not let that trouble you any more; for, Miss Melfert"—with a twinkle in his eye—"there are a good many things that a man of my age does not feel it necessary to tell either his mother or his sisters. Your misfortunes do not in the least affect your character—that, I know, is pure and unblemished. You have been the victim of wrong and treachery; but that does not make you unfit to teach my little brother and sister. You need protection and friends; you could not be safer than you will be if you go abroad with my family; you say you are content to be with us; then, Miss Melfert, I beg that you will not think of leaving us," he concluded, earnestly.

"I will consider the matter, and you are very kind to plan for my comfort and safety," she answered, gratefully.

He opened his lips eagerly as if to speak; then closed them resolutely again, and the next moment the children appeared with Gustave.

Fred and Clara were disappointed at being obliged to go home so early, but when their brother told them that Miss Melfert was ill, and they saw her pale face and heavy eyes, they said no more, but appeared to be perfectly willing to return.

To Pearle it seemed, as she wearily retraced her steps to the villa, as if all the newly-acquired rest and peace of her life had suddenly departed. She knew that she should live in constant fear as long as they remained among the mountains; and even should she go abroad, she thought it would not be such a very difficult thing for Adison Cheetham to track her.

Upon young Lord Fennelsea there had fallen a sudden and heavy blow that day.

He had been quietly watching this fair, beautiful, gentle woman for weeks. At first he had been attracted by her beauty; then her patience and invariable sweetness had gradually won his heart, and of late he had begun to dream of trying to win her for his wife.

He knew that his haughty mother and sister would oppose—that they had high aspirations and lofty plans for the eldest son and heir; but this did not trouble or daunt him, and he knew that he should be happier to spend his life with this beautiful, tender girl than with a princess of the royal blood.

But all such dreams had to-day been rudely broken and dispelled. She could never be his—he had no right now to think of winning her; she was the wife of another, and with apparently a life of unhappiness—or, at best, of only patient endurance—before her.

“It is of no use,” he sighed, when he left her at the door, and went away by himself to think it all over alone. “I have no right even to look upon her. I must trample all my wishes and desires under my feet; but, I swear, it is too hard. Curse the wretch! But then, even if she was not his wife, she could not be mine, for there is another she loves. Ah, well, time may soften this wound, but I do not believe I’ll ever see another woman whom I can learn to love as easily as I have learned to love Margaret Radcliffe.”

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE BIRD FLOWN.

Lady Fennelsea was just about starting to join the picnic party when they returned.

Although somewhat surprised that they should come so early, yet she heaved a sigh of relief when she saw them, for it was more of an effort than she liked to make to climb the hill and go struggling about the woods; but she had promised the children that she would join them, and she did not like to disappoint them.

She went to the window as she heard their voices, and her brow grew dark when she saw that her son was not only one of the party, but that he was actually walking with Miss Melfert, and to all appearances in confidential conversation with her.

Miss Camilla saw them, and observed, with a sneer :

“Matters are really progressing quite rapidly. I told you, mamma, there would be mischief if you retained your handsome governess. Ambrose admires her exceedingly, and I should not be at all surprised if he has been with her all day.”

“Don’t be foolish, Camilla,” returned her mother, impatiently; “you do not suppose, I hope, that your brother would lower himself enough to pay any particular attention to a girl in her position.”

Miss Camilla smiled skeptically.

“You know as well as I, mamma,” she said, “that Ambrose would never stop to consider position if he really

liked her, provided, at least, that the girl was respectable. I would advise you to keep a sharp lookout, for, of course, there is no doubt that Miss Melfert would be glad to secure a rich and handsome husband for herself."

The object of their remarks now entered the room, thus putting an end to further conversation regarding him.

"How happens it that the children returned so early, and that *you* are with them?" demanded Lady Fennelsea, striving to speak playfully, yet betraying her disapprobation and anxiety in spite of herself, much to the amusement of her son.

"Why, being one of 'the children' myself, I thought I was also entitled to my share of the holiday sports," he answered, mischievously; then added, more gravely: "The reason we returned so early was on Miss Melfert's account; she was taken suddenly ill."

"Ambrose! you do not mean to tell me that you have been in the company of that girl all day long!" cried his mother, aghast.

"By no means," he answered, laughing heartily at her chagrin; "but I thought I would like to give the children a little surprise, so I went early to the knoll and constructed an arbor for them, and you should have seen their delight—it would have done you good."

The young man, notwithstanding his mention of the delight of the children, was thinking more of the pleasure which lighted up Pearle's beautiful face when she beheld the leafy bower which he had made.

"I played a few games with them," he resumed; "then we had our lunch, after which I took Fred and Clara down to the lake to fish. I had promised them I would do so some time, and thought this a good opportunity to redeem my pledge."

"What was Miss Melfert doing all this time?" her ladyship asked, suspiciously.

The young man's lip curled slightly, but he replied :

"I could not say, not being there to watch her; I left her gathering up the fragments and packing the dishes. She declined accompanying us on our fishing expedition on account of the little one, who, she said, needed rest."

"What is the matter with her? you said she was ill."

"A sudden faintness or dizziness, I believe; I went back to get an extra hook and line, and found her sitting, pale and trembling, in a chair. I advised her to return at once, and so we are here," was all the explanation he thought it necessary to make.

"Humph!" sneered Miss Camilla, audibly.

"Well, what now?" he demanded, turning sharply upon her.

"How *very* considerate in you to wait upon the pretty governess home; you seem to admire her exceedingly," his sister retorted, significantly.

"I certainly do," he returned, heartily and frankly.

"My dear Ambrose, I *pray* you will not allow your fancy, your admiration for a pretty face, to get the better of your judgment," Lady Fennelsea exclaimed, anxiously.

She had been considerably re-assured by his account of the way the day had been spent, and much gratified that he should have thought of contributing to the children's gratification; but his outspoken admiration of Miss Melfert had startled her out of her composure again.

"In what way, mother?" he asked, bluntly.

"By—by betraying your feelings to—to the governess. I fear—I—she might build hopes upon it that could never be realized, you know. I should regret exceedingly to

have you become entangled in any way with a person in *her* position."

Lady Fennelsea spoke rather confusedly when she began, but gaining courage as she proceeded, she closed her remarks with her usual composure and dignity.

His lordship bit his lips with anger and impatience, and for the moment was tempted to make some scathing retort. But his regard for Miss Melfert, his desire to keep her secret, and that she should remain with his mother, conquered, and he answered, with an apparent frankness and indifference, that wholly re-assured her :

"You need have no fears on that score," he said. "I confess that I admire Miss Melfert, and consider her one of the most perfect ladies, in every respect, that I have ever met ; and, notwithstanding her position, I should be proud to regard her as a friend ; but as far as any more intimate relations are concerned—if that is what you fear—it is just as impossible as that the sun should cease to shine."

It was well for him that his anxious mother could not read the bitterness there was in his heart as he made this last statement.

"I am rejoiced to hear you express yourself so decidedly. I should be sorry to have Miss Melfert compromised in any way, and your own prospects in life, my son, must not be marred by a *mesalliance*," her ladyship replied, heaving a sigh of relief.

But Miss Camilla's suspicions were not so easily allayed. She had been furtively searching her brother's face, and had discerned the troubled gleam in his eye, and the lines of pain about his mouth that he had not been able to entirely smooth out.

"The artful jade, is coquetting with him. I will watch her," she said to herself.

"Well, mother, that matter being disposed of to your mind, I may as well state what I came in to say—I am tired of staying in this wild place, and intend to go home to the Priory to-morrow."

This unexpected announcement filled Lady Fennelsea with dismay, while at the same time it served to confirm her belief in his indifference to the governess.

"Going home to-morrow!" she exclaimed. "That cannot be thought of for a moment. I could never consent to stay here without a protector,"

Lord Fennelsea very well knew this; he had accordingly laid this innocent little trap for his mother to fall into, and all on Miss Melfert's account. He had made up his mind that it would be quite as well for her to leave the place before Adison Cheetham should mature any more plans to kidnap her.

"Well, I will leave Gustave, if you wish; I can get along without him; but stay here *I* will not any longer," he replied, decidedly.

"Gustave indeed! a mere servant, and with no more courage than a mouse. I did not think of remaining more than a fortnight longer, but it will take a week, at least, to pack up everything and get ready to leave. Can't you possibly stand it for a week longer?" her ladyship asked, in perplexity.

"No; I shall die of *ennui*," he answered, with a yawn, and feeling Camilla's keen eyes upon him.

Lady Fennelsea plumed her feathers contentedly at this. Surely Miss Melfert's attractions were not very powerful, if her son was dying of *ennui*. How foolish she had been to be troubled about anything so absurd.

But it was excessively annoying to be obliged to hurry

off so—for stay there without Ambrose she would not for a single night.

“Well,” she said, after a long and thoughtful pause, if it must be, why, it *must* be. I suppose I can manage to get off with you, if you will not go until evening; and, on the whole, I do not know but it will be best—the weather is getting cooler, and we shall get started on our trip in better season.”

Lady Fennelsea was remarkable for one thing; she had a faculty of adapting herself to circumstances that few women possess, and always tried to make a virtue of necessity.

Miss Camilla was greatly pleased with this decision, for she had been terribly dull and homesick ever since leaving the Priory; and her heart bounded with pleasure when her brother spoke of returning.

She said they could easily be ready to go with him, and promised to assist in all the necessary preparations. So it was decided they should go; the servants were immediately notified, and the work of packing begun at once.

Pearle was intensely relieved at the news, and began to breathe freely again, and lent such effectual service in getting things ready for packing that Lady Fennelsea commended her warmly for her energy and usefulness.

Ambrose Fennelsea watched those preparations, chuckling to himself over the success of his scheme, and all the following day he assisted the busy workers, never leaving the villa; for he instinctively feared that Pearle's villainous husband might be prowling around.

They left at six o'clock, and two of the party felt their hearts grow lighter of their burden as they drove from the place which they believed to be fraught with danger and exposure to one of them.

Their fears were not groundless, for an hour later Addison Cheetham drove furiously up to the villa with the intention of seeking an interview with Lady Fennelsea, and demanding that his wife be surrendered to him.

Gustave, and one other servant, had been left behind to attend to a few last duties, and were to follow the family on the morrow; and his lordship had instructed the former what he should say regarding the departure of the family, in case any inquiries should be made of him.

The baffled husband ground his teeth, and swore lustily when he discovered that his bird had flown; and it was in no pleasant frame of mind that he took his leave, without having discovered whether the family had returned to their home, or were traveling for awhile—Gustave had left him in a most tantalizing state of uncertainty regarding their movements.

After pondering the matter awhile, he determined to proceed to Dunbarton Priory and ascertain for himself; but upon returning to the hotel where he was staying he found an imperative summons to "return to Pelham Pines," awaiting him, and he was forced to obey and leave his pursuit of Pearle until another time.

What the need of his presence was in his own home, just now, was more than he could imagine, as his business was all in the hands of a trusty agent; but the message was worded in a way to forbid his disregarding it, and he reluctantly turned his face toward the home of his childhood, where he had so fondly hoped to bring Pearle as his wife.

Pelham Pines, whatever it may have been in the past, and while under his father's inefficient management, was now a fine and thriving estate.

The barren ground had been enriched year after year

until it had attained to a high state of cultivation; little by little it had been reclaimed, and now it might be well looked upon with pride by him who had accomplished so much.

Everywhere, as far as the eye could reach, there might be seen, in their season, broad fields of waving grain, luxuriant meadow and upland, where sleek, fat cattle browsed; orchards of choicest fruit; gardens of beauty and fragrance; while the ancestral mansion, solid and sensible in point of architecture, had been thoroughly repaired and much improved, and now testified to the thrift and comfortable circumstances of its enterprising proprietor.

"What in thunder do you want of me to hurry me home at this rate?" Adison Cheetham testily demanded of his agent, upon the night of his arrival at Pelham Pines.

"I want nothing, sir; but two gentlemen called here a few days since, and desired that you might be sent for, as they had business of great importance with you."

"Couldn't they have come to me?" he growled.

"I do not know, sir; they said they would wait at the inn until they received word from me of your arrival."

"What can they want of me, I wonder? I owe no one," he muttered to himself; then in a loud tone: "Who are they—what are their names?"

"I do not know, sir; they did not give them; but were anxious to be notified as soon as you returned," replied the agent.

"Well, it's too late to-night to transact any business of whatever nature, but you can ride over to-morrow morning and notify them that I am here and ready to receive them whenever they see fit to honor me with their visit."

Having disposed of that matter, the master of Pelham

Pines proceeded to question his agent regarding the state of the crops, etc.

"There never was so heavy a yield before, sir," he said, with a smirk of satisfaction. "The north twenty-acre lot has just about doubled on last year; the grapery will net you a handsome profit this season, if we have no early frosts; and the orchards, sir—you *never* saw such handsome fruit before, I'll warrant."

Surely this was encouraging to the master of Pelham Pines, and he settled back in his chair with an air of comfort and satisfaction, not unmixed with a feeling of growing importance.

Everything was prospering with him; nothing that he had turned his hand to, in a business way, had disappointed him. He bade fair to be a very rich man ere many years should pass, and, but for the one prize he coveted, there seemed nothing on earth that he need ask for.

"And I will win *her* yet; I will never yield my point until I conquer," he muttered, resolutely, as he retired to his couch, all unconscious of the retribution that was already fast overtaking him for some of the dark deeds of his past.

He slept as serenely and refreshingly as though not a sin nor a burden lay upon his conscience, and arose in the morning to look out upon his broad, smiling possessions, with a feeling of pompous pride and exultation, akin to that which a miser feels when he looks upon his hoarded, shining gold.

His breakfast was served as daintily as the most fastidious could desire, in the pleasant, sunny dining-room, by an attentive rosy-checked damsel; and, with his appetite satisfied, and in high good-humor with himself and all the world, he repaired to his well-furnished library, to look

over his accounts, and write some letters, while awaiting the visit of the strangers who were so anxious for his return.

He felt considerable curiosity regarding them and the nature of their business, and every now and then glanced impatiently from the window near which he sat.

The clock had just struck ten, when he heard the tread of horses' hoofs and the sound of wheels crunching the gravel outside.

Again he glanced from the window, hoping to catch a glance of his visitors before they should enter; but they had already alighted, and he could hear their voices in the hall.

A moment later a servant threw open the library door, and ushered in two gentlemen.

Adison Cheetham arose, and turned to greet them courteously, when some sudden inward shock seemed to stagnate his blood, stopping the very beating of his heart, and transfixing him to the spot.

One of his visitors he had never seen before; the other he knew at a glance; and he knew, also, that he came as an avenger of the wronged and innocent.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

PROVIDENTIAL.

For a week after her return to the Priory, Pearle scarce ventured out of the house, so fearful was she that her restless husband might follow her and continue his persecutions.

But as there were no signs of any stranger in the neighborhood this feeling gradually wore away, and she at length resumed her accustomed daily exercise, although she did not venture far from the Priory, and never went out without a companion.

She had a faithful guardian, however, in Lord Ambrose, who, without annoying her with his presence, yet managed to keep himself apprised of her whereabouts whenever she left the house.

He also felt somewhat uneasy regarding the plans of the villain whom he had encountered in the arbor on the hill; he feared he would employ some stratagem to accomplish his purpose, consequently he was always on the alert, determined to outwit him if possible.

He interested himself in all his mother's plans for her projected tour, arranging everything so nicely and wisely that she flattered herself that there was not another such a son in all the kingdom.

But when he at length informed her and Camilla of his intention of remaining at home, there was a stormy scene.

"Pray, when did you change your mind regarding this matter?" Camilla demanded, angrily and suspiciously.

She was not sure but that the despised governess was at the bottom of it, after all; while his mother remained silent from consternation.

"I have other plans in view," he answered, evasively.

"Such as what, if I may presume to inquire?" she asked, with a sneer.

She had anticipated much pleasure in being accompanied everywhere by her handsome brother, and she was exceedingly angry and annoyed to have her plans upset in this unexpected manner.

"Spare your sneers, Camilla—they do not offend me in

the least, although I regret your disappointment," he replied, coldly. "I have come to the conclusion that I have sought my own pleasure long enough. I have resolved to settle down to life in good earnest now, and I shall try for a seat in Parliament the coming session."

"Ambrose, do you really mean it?" Lady Fennelsea exclaimed, the cloud lifting instantly from her brow, and her whole face flushing with pleasure. She was willing to forego much for such an event as this.

"Yes; and I do not need to remind you that there is work to be accomplished before the election; and so, you see, you will be obliged to dispense with my company abroad. I have, however, arranged so that you will have a pleasant and suitable escort."

"Whom?" interrupted Camilla, impatiently.

"Sir William and Lady Warner have been spending the summer at a noted resort in France—Vannes is the name of the place. Her ladyship's health is much improved, and they are now contemplating a protracted tour, and will be very happy to have you join them."

He had known of their plans for some time, Sir William being an intimate friend of his; but he had arranged for the two families uniting into one party since his return from Scotland.

His resolution to try for Parliament had been as sudden as his return had been. He must have some excuse for remaining behind, for he knew that Pearle would not feel comfortable about accompanying his mother if he was one of the party, and her interests and safety were more to him just now than anything else.

"That will be very pleasant. I admire both Sir William and Lady Helen very much," said Lady Fennelsea.

She would not put a straw in the way of her son becoming an M. P.

"I am glad if my plan meets with your approbation," he replied. "They will remain two or three weeks longer by the sea, and I propose that you go directly to Vannes, and get a little benefit of the air before starting upon your travels."

"The idea strikes me very favorably," said his mother, reflectively.

"It will spoil the whole trip if you do not go. I never was more disappointed over anything in my life," pouted his sister, intent on her own selfish pleasure.

"My dear," interposed her ladyship, "we shall do very well. I have not a word to say against your brother's plans, although I too am disappointed to lose his companionship. But if he is really in earnest about settling down to some object in life, I will put no obstacle in his path. If you get your seat, Ambrose, I shall be very proud," she concluded, with a fond glance at him.

"I do not think there is much doubt about it. Lord Waldron will use his influence for me. He proposed the measure to me last year, but I did not give it much thought."

"The next thing I shall look forward to will be to have you well married," Lady Fennelsea said, archly.

Lord Ambrose frowned. There was but one woman whom he wanted to marry, and her he could not hope to win.

"One thing at a time, mother. You will have to wait until the right woman makes her appearance," he answered, with a short, nervous laugh that made Camilla prick up her ears.

"That will not be long," her ladyship answered, laugh-

ing. She was sure that any woman would be proud to become my Lady Fennelsea, of Dunbarton Priory.

At the end of a week after their return from Scotland the family went to London, and another week found them *en route* for France, while the Priory was closed, excepting a few rooms in the east wing, which were occupied by the housekeeper and the servants.

* * * * *

A few evenings after the departure of Lady Fennelsea and her family from the Priory, while William, the "chore boy," as he was called, was closing the outside shutters to the kitchen, he was startled by stumbling upon a strange man, who was concealed behind a clump of hollyhocks near a window.

An exclamation of fear escaped him. He hastily let go of the shutter he was closing, and, being something of a coward, turned to fly, when the stranger seized him by the arm, and holding him firmly, whispered re-assuringly :

"Hold on, my good fellow. I mean no one any harm, but I particularly wish to speak to you for a minute."

Somewhat calmed by this statement, the boy ceased his struggles for freedom, and roughly asked :

"Whom may ye be, sur?"

"That does not matter just now. I am a relative of Miss Melfert, and came to make a friendly call, but I found the front part of the house closed, and so came around here to see if I could arouse some one."

"Faith, sur, an' ye've 'roused meself in a way not at all to me liking," the boy said, with a shrug of his ungainly shoulders, and trying to get a glimpse of the man's face.

"I am sorry if I have frightened you," the stranger returned, kindly, and dexterously slipping a piece of money into the boy's hand.

"Thank'ee, sur," William returned, appreciatively, and he immediately became loquacious. "It's Miss Milfert, the gove'nness, yer after, is it? Sure it's sorry I am that ye'll not find her here, bein' she have gone abroad wid her ladyship and the children."

"Gone abroad!" echoed Adison Cheetham—for it was indeed he—and it is impossible to describe the astonished, crest-fallen tone in which he spoke. "Where have they gone?"

"To France, yer honor—leastwise that's where they've started for."

"What part of France?"

"Well, now, yer honor, I do not just now remember the place where they are to stop for a time before they begin their toor. It's near the say somewhere, I think, his lordship said," returned the boy, reflectively.

"Near the sea; and they are going to remain there a while, you say?"

"Yes, yer honor; a couple of weeks or more."

"You are sure the governess went with them?"—this was asked with some anxiety.

"Lawks, yer honor, they couldn't do widout her noway. No one can manage the young ones like her—savin' yer presence—and it's no flatterer I am."

"Did the—the little one go with her?"

"Sure, sur, she sets her eyes by the spalpeen, and would as soon have left one of thim behind as her," asserted William.

"Do you think you could find out by to-morrow the name of the place where they have gone, and let me know if I should come here again in the evening? I am greatly disappointed not to see Miss Melfert, as I have come a long distance to visit her;" and the crafty villain supple-

mented his request by pressing another coin into the boy's hand.

"Thankee, sur; yer a gintleman, sur. I makes no doubt but I'll find out for yez by that time;" and the youth jingled his coins merrily.

Adison Cheetham told him not to fail, and cautioned him to say nothing of having met him there, as it might perhaps frighten the women. He arranged to meet him at a spot some distance from the house on the following evening, and then quietly departed.

William, the chore boy, had no difficulty in ascertaining Lady Fennelsea's address for the next three weeks, which he imparted the following evening, with much apparent satisfaction, to the "foin gintleman," as he designated Adison Cheetham in his own mind, and from whom he received ample compensation for the service.

That same "foin gintleman" lost no time after that in following the party abroad, determined to secure his victim at all hazards.

He had resolved upon a bold move. Things had come to such a pass that he must get Pearle into his power at once, or lose her forever.

* * * * *

The evening following the one that Adison spent prowling around Dunbarton Priory, Richard Byrnholm and Sir Harold Cheswick were seated in one corner of the public parlor of their club-house, engaged in earnest and troubled conversation.

"What shall I do? Where shall I go next? I am almost in despair," Richard said to his friend; and surely his anxious eyes and haggard face testified to the truth of his assertion.

"It is a hard case, my boy," Sir Harold answered,

gravely; "but you must trust everything to an even tenderer and wiser protector than yourself. I believe there is One who will see to it that your Pearle comes to no harm, much as you have cause to fear."

He had hardly completed his sentence when the door directly opposite them opened, and a fine-looking young man of about Richard's age entered.

"Holloa!" Sir Harold cried, starting to his feet and advancing toward the stranger with outstretched hand, and a look of pleasure on his fine face. "How are you, Fennelsea?"

Lord Ambrose heartily shook the proffered hand, and returned his cordial greeting.

The Baronet then drew him toward Richard, whom he introduced.

The young lord started violently as he uttered the name "Captain Richard Byrnholm," and keenly searched the handsome face of the man whom Margaret Radcliffe loved so well, while at the same time he thought it a little singular that he should happen to meet him just at this time.

Notwithstanding his own disappointment he found his heart going out with sympathy to the unhappy lover, whose sad eyes and haggard face plainly testified to the suffering he was even now enduring.

"You are quite a stranger, my young friend," Sir Harold said, to break the awkward pause that had followed the introduction. "I have not seen you in an age."

"No, I have been quite a Bohemian of late, but I am going to mend my ways now, and settle down to something definite," he answered, wondering what Richard Byrnholm would say if he knew what had caused him to make this resolution.

"I trust Lady Fennelsea is well," said Sir Harold.

"Yes, thank you, in excellent health and spirits. I saw the whole family off for France the first of the week."

"Indeed! Her ladyship is very energetic to assume the responsibility of traveling with so many in charge and without an escort. I wonder you did not accompany her."

"She has her governess to assist her; they are going to the sea-side for a short time, and then Sir William Warner, a friend of ours, will join them and act as escort," explained the young man.

"Ah! who has Lady Fennelsea for a governess to the children? The last time I saw her she was greatly disturbed at not being able to obtain one to her mind," Sir Harold said.

His lordship hesitated a moment before replying. He knew that Pearle was anxious to keep her whereabouts a secret from all her friends, and he hesitated to pronounce the name she had assumed lest they should read the secret in his face. He had never been told that Pearle had formerly been an inmate of Sir Harold's family, and so he was wholly unconscious of the dangerous ground upon which he stood.

Still some instinct prompted him to reply evasively:

"My mother has succeeded in securing a very efficient young lady—one very highly educated, and to whom the children are deeply attached."

"Such governesses are scarce," Sir Harold said, his mind instantly reverting to Pearle. "Where did you find her? What is her name?"

The baronet was not usually so inquisitive, but he was an old friend of Lady Fennelsea, and the question came out before he thought.

"Our family physician recommended her to us, and her name is Miss Margaret Melfert."

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed Richard, bounding from his seat, and confronting his new acquaintance with blazing eyes and excited mien, and Ambrose knew at once that the secret was out—the mischief was done.

"Margaret Melfert did you say?" he demanded, breathlessly, and as if he feared his ears had deceived him.

"Yes, that is the lady's name," returned the young man, uneasily, and wishing that the fates had led his steps anywhere, rather than there, that evening.

"Where did you say she had gone? Tell me quickly, if you have any mercy!" Richard cried, nervously, heedless of how his words might sound to this stranger.

Sir Harold also appeared somewhat excited at what he had heard, but he felt that some explanation was due for the young lover's excitement.

"It is providential, my young friend, that you should have stumbled upon us here to-night. The lady you have just mentioned we have every reason to believe is not really Miss Melfert, but Miss Margaret Radcliffe, of Ashton Manor, and sister to the Earl of Radcliffe. Her friends are very anxious regarding her, and have been searching diligently for her over a year now. I cannot be too thankful that we have met, and that you have enlightened us upon this very important matter."

Lord Ambrose, however, did not participate in that thankfulness. He looked exceedingly grave and troubled, for he feared he had committed an irreparable blunder for which Pearle would censure him.

"Had I known that *you* knew *who* Miss Melfert is, I should never have mentioned her name in your presence," he said, remorsefully; adding: "I know something of the lady's sad history, and also that she is particularly desirous of remaining in obscurity; but I had not a suspicion that

any one would recognize her by the name of Melfert, since she told me that it was an assumed one."

Richard started at this; it did not please him to know that the woman whom he loved should have confided her sorrowful secrets to this handsome young lord.

"Nor should we have recognized her but from the fact that she was companion for a time to my own little daughter, and a strange combination of circumstances has led to the discovery of who she really is," Sir Harold said.

He would have gone on to relate something of her history to prove his point, but Richard interrupted him.

"I pray you will relieve my anxiety and tell me whither she has gone," he pleaded, excitedly; "and," he added, "it is absolutely necessary that I find her immediately."

"She, for the present, is at Vannes in France; but—pardon me—I know she would prefer to remain lost to all who knew her in the past—her heart is still very sad, and she has recently received a shock which has made her very timid and nervous," Lord Fennelsea replied, and then he proceeded to give them an account of Pearle's encounter with Adison Cheetham, and how he had thus learned so much of her painful history.

"Sir Harold, I must go to Vannes at once," Richard said, with white, trembling lips; "if that wretch has discovered that she is with Lady Fennelsea he will follow her to the ends of the earth—he will leave no stone unturned to triumph over me."

"Richard, be calm——" began Sir Harold.

"Be calm, when my whole future is at stake—be calm, when so much depends upon immediate action; you ask an impossibility of me," he said, impatiently. "I will go and get a time-table and see what time a train leaves for

Dover, and whether I can catch a steamer across the channel."

"My friend," interposed Lord Ambrose, much troubled, for he believed Pearle would be made utterly wretched to have him seek her now, "pray be advised by me—do not go to Miss Radcliffe"—how they all avoided calling her by the hated name she bore!—"it would cause her bitterest pain, and—forgive me—it can do neither of you any possible good. If you fear that man will seek her, bent upon forcing her to render obedience, I will join my mother at Vannes immediately, and defend her with my life. Perhaps," he continued, coloring deeply, "you may think it presuming for me, a stranger, to speak thus, but Miss Radcliffe assured me that she could on no account return to her own friends."

Sir Harold smiled at the young man's evident enthusiasm in the cause of his mother's governess.

"We will go immediately to Vannes—go and get a time-table at once," he said to Richard, who instantly darted away. "My lord, let me speak with you privately a few moments," he added, drawing the young man farther into one corner, for several gentlemen had just entered the room; and there he conversed with him in quiet but earnest tones until Richard returned, his face, which had so lately been anxious and sad, now animated with something of hope.

"A train leaves for Dover at midnight to catch a steamer that leaves early in the morning," he said to Sir Harold.

"Then we will go at once," he answered, rising—"for, of course, I go with you." And, shaking hands with the young lord, they quickly left the place.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LADY FENNELSEA SURPRISED.

Lady Fennelsea and her family were most comfortably and pleasantly established in a first-class hotel (which was also partially a medical establishment where many invalids resorted for their health) in the suburbs of Vannes.

It was fast becoming a noted place, this little spot of beauty, with its health-giving breezes, its charming scenery, and inviting quiet, so near the city, and yet upon the very verge of the sea.

Lady Fennelsea, Camilla, and Francita occupied handsome rooms upon the second floor, while Pearle and Amy, with the two children and maid, had cheaper, though not less pleasant, apartments directly above.

They were all charmed with the place, and found Sir William Warner and his beautiful but delicate wife a very agreeable addition to their party.

The hotel was situated upon quite an abrupt eminence, and surrounded by lovely grounds, while at their feet, and not more than three or five minutes' walk from the door, was the smooth, gleaming beach, where invalids could be wheeled in the smoothly rolling chairs provided for that purpose, and where children and visitors could play and promenade at their pleasure.

It had been long since Pearle had had a sight of the sea, and now she seemed actually to revel in the pure, bracing air, and the beauty which everywhere surrounded her. Every day, accompanied by the children, she strolled upon

the beach, spending a couple of hours in the most delightful manner to both herself and her little charges. The place was so quiet, so retired, that her fears that Adison Cheetham would follow her seemed to vanish as if by magic.

"He surely will never find me here," she thought, and yet all unconscious that her enemy was following her as fast as the power of steam could convey him.

One day they wandered farther than usual from the hotel, and came at length to a charming little grove of pines, where enticing little rows of seats had been scattered in every direction to tempt the weary to rest.

It was so shady and inviting here that Pearle sat down to rest; but the children, never weary of playing upon the beach, where they gathered pebbles, shells, and sea-weed, begged that they might be allowed to remain there.

She gave them permission, and then, feeling delightfully indolent and care-free, leaned back in her chair and looked out over the broad, gleaming waters, and listened to the music of the breeze in the feathery pines overhead.

She had not been sitting there long before the sound of wheels attracted her attention.

Looking up, she saw a young man wheeling a beautiful lady of perhaps twenty-two or three years of age, in an invalid chair.

They were accompanied by an elderly woman of about fifty, and from her resemblance to the gentleman, Pearle concluded, must be his mother.

The face of the invalid—the young man's wife Pearle supposed her to be—was exceedingly beautiful, save for its marble whiteness, and a strangely vacant expression about the eyes, which betrayed at once an intellect impaired.

Tears involuntarily sprang to the fair girl's own eyes, as

she looked upon this trio and realized the nature of their trial.

"How much of sorrow there is in the world! She cannot be much older than I, and how fearful to lose one's mind, and still have to live on indefinitely! I have much to be thankful for, even in my own deep trouble," she thought, with a long-drawn sigh of mingled pity and gratitude.

The wind took up that sympathetic sigh and wafted it to the ears of the gentleman wheeling the invalid. He turned toward her, and something in her pitying glance, and the sweet, tremulous expression of her lips, must have impressed him, for he lifted his hat and bowed slightly as he passed by.

Pearle colored, not realizing, until this act convinced her of it, how patent her sympathy must have been to him.

"I wonder who they can be, and what has caused that terrible misfortune!" she said to herself, feeling a deep and sudden interest in them.

At the request of the children she went to the grove again the next day, where she met the stranger a second time. Evidently the cool shadow of the fragrant pines was a favorite resort of the invalid as well as of herself and her charges.

Again the young man lifted his hat and bowed slightly, and his earnest glance to-day betrayed a feeling of interest on his own part as to who this stately, beautiful girl might be, with her sad gray eyes and high-bred bearing.

The next day Amy was not very well, and Pearle was obliged to leave her in the care of the maid while she went out with Master Fred and Miss Clara.

Thinking she would avoid meeting the strangers again, lest they might deem her unduly curious regarding them,

she took another path leading from the hotel and turned her steps in a different direction.

The children started to run down the hill, while she followed more slowly.

Half way down the path there was a beautiful yew tree, and sitting alone in the shade of this was the lovely invalid that Pearle had seen twice before. Instinctively she slackened her steps as she came near, wondering why she should be left alone, when suddenly a gust of wind took the dainty hat from the stranger's head and sent it flying into a clump of bushes near by.

It was but the work of a moment for Pearle to secure it, and going to the invalid's side, she was about to hand it to her, when, with a trusting smile into her face, she bent her head forward to have it replaced.

"Shall I tie it on for you?" she asked, returning the smile, as she gently placed it upon the soft, clustering hair; and her heart was more deeply stirred than ever by her sad infirmity.

"Yes, please," and the sick one lifted her chin to have the strings tied beneath.

Such a pretty chin it was, too, so fair and round, and such a witching dimple in it. The lips also—how sweet they were! the nose small and straight, with the exception of a little coquettish inclination to turn upward at the end; and the eyes! a thrill shot through Pearle as she met those large, dark eyes, fixed so trustfully on hers—something in them moved her strangely. Where had she seen such eyes before?

"Have you seen Adi?" she asked, in sweet, flute-like tones, when Pearle had finished tying the hat ribbons into a pretty bow.

Supposing she referred to some one who was attending

her, Pearle replied in the negative ; and the girl, heaving a deep sigh, said, sadly :

“Well, perhaps he will come to-morrow—I must be patient.”

The tone, the sigh, and the look of almost heart-broken sadness with which it was said, brought the tears involuntarily to Pearle’s eyes.

“Are you alone?” she asked, gently.

The girl seemed not to have heard her, but sat looking absently off upon the water.

A step sounded upon the gravel behind her, and turning quickly, Pearle stood face to face with the gentleman whom she had always seen with her before.

His hands were full of flowers, which he gently laid in the lap of his charge, then lifting his hat he again bowed to Pearle.

“Thank you,” he said, glancing from her to the hat she had captured and replaced. “I should not have left her, but she asked for the flowers, and I do not like to refuse her anything.”

“*She* does not know where *Adi* is—will he come to-morrow?” the sick girl asked, fixing her eyes wistfully upon him.

“Perhaps he will come to-morrow,” he replied, gravely, though he sighed as he noted Pearle’s pitying look, and then with another bow he passed on with his charge, and she hastened to join the children.

It made her very sad to see one so fair and lovely in such a state, and her heart ached for that unhappy husband, as she believed him to be, who was so devoted and tender to her in her helplessness.

Whether she was oppressed by this, or whether her anxiety for Amy, who seemed quite unwell, caused it, she

could not have explained, but a sense of dreariness, loneliness, and impending evil settled down upon her, and before the day was half over she had grown so nervous that the slightest noise startled her and made the tears spring unbidden to her eyes.

During the afternoon, while she was sitting in Lady Fennelsea's room, reading aloud to her ladyship and Francita, a servant entered, bearing a card upon a silver tray.

Lady Fennelsea took it and read the name inscribed upon it, and her brow contracted with a look of perplexity.

Turning it over, she read a few words penciled upon the back, when she immediately rose and left the room.

Going below to the receiving-parlor, she found a stranger—a gentleman—awaiting her. He arose as she entered and bowed low before her.

"I crave your ladyship's pardon," he began, in insinuating tones, "for seeking this interview, being an entire stranger to you, and only the sternest necessity would have compelled me to do so."

Lady Fennelsea bowed somewhat coldly in reply to this speech, and then invited him to be seated, while she also settled herself comfortably in an easy-chair.

"I understand," the stranger continued, with a keen glance into her face, "that you have a young lady in your family who *calls* herself Miss Melfert."

"Yes, that is my governess' name," Lady Fennelsea replied, bridling, and wondering what possible interest this man, who wrote his address "Adison Cheetham, Pelham Pines, Aylesbury, Bucks Co.," could have in her governess.

She devoutly hoped he was no aspiring "follower," for she did not relish the idea of being obliged to give up

Pearle's valuable services, even in the indefinite future. She would be glad to keep her as long as Fred and Clara should need instruction at home.

"Ah!" Adison Cheetham said, with an accent of satisfaction at her reply, "you will excuse me, I trust, but it is my duty to tell you that Miss Melfert is a name that the lady has assumed—it is not her real name."

"Not her real name!" repeated the woman, drawing a startled breath, while thoughts of what Camilla had hinted and suspected began to flit through her head.

"No, your ladyship," he answered, with his sinister smile.

"How do you know?—what is her name?—who is she?" she demanded, her usual self-possession somewhat shaken by learning anything so suspicious.

"I know from a personal acquaintance with her. Her name is—Mrs. Adison Cheetham; and she is—*my wife!*"

For a moment Lady Fennelsea looked the consternation and astonishment that she could not give utterance to.

"This must be some miserable practical joke—there can be no truth in what you affirm," she retorted, frowning, and without considering that she was giving the lie direct to this stranger.

Adison Cheetham flushed hotly at the imputation cast upon his veracity.

"Madam, you will have the goodness to read this," he said, with offended dignity, as he passed her the same paper which he had so recently shown her son.

She took it and read it.

"Do you mean to tell me that Margaret Melfert and Margaret Radcliffe are one and the same person?" she asked, severely, a fiery gleam in her eyes, which plainly

said that if Miss Melfert had thus deceived her she should surely suffer for it.

"Yes, your ladyship—one and the same."

"Did she voluntarily marry you?"

Adison Cheetham colored at the blunt question, but he answered :

"We were married in church, before hundreds of witnesses, and by the clergyman whose name you read there."

"Radcliffe—Radcliffe—that is a good name," said Lady Fennelsea, musingly.

"Yes, madam ; my wife is most respectably connected," Adison Cheetham replied, with a stately manner.

Lady Fennelsea flushed ; she knew there were people by the name of Radcliffe who stood very high in the world, although she was not personally acquainted with them ; and she did not like to think that her governess, whom she had patronized and tried to put down and brow-beat on account of her position, was in any way connected with them—it would not be pleasant to remember, if, at any time in the future, she should happen to meet either her or her relatives in the proud circles of the *bon ton*.

"I think you must be mistaken—I cannot believe that Miss Melfert is the person whom you believe her to be," she said, 'uneasily.

"I think I can prove to you what I have asserted," he answered, with a slight smile, as he read her annoyance.

"You doubtless remember the holiday and picnic which your children enjoyed with their governess and *their brother*, a few weeks ago."

"Yes," Lady Fennelsea returned, flushing again at the stress he laid upon those two words—it was as if he placed the governess and the young lord of Dunbarton Priory upon equal ground.

"I had an interview with my wife upon that occasion," her visitor continued, "during which I begged her to return with me to our home. Did not your son acquaint you with the incidents of that day?" he asked, with sarcastic significance.

Lady Fennelsea was almost boiling with rage, both at his insolence and at the thought that *her son*—one of the high and mighty ones of earth—should have been in collusion with the governess—her servant and dependent—deceiving her, and thus assisting the girl in her gross deception, if this tale was true.

Now she could understand Miss Melfert's sudden illness, that had necessitated her return from the picnic; now she could understand why Ambrose had hurried them away from the mountains with such reckless haste. They had been in sympathy with each other; they had dared to have a secret in common, pulling the wool over her eyes, and making her a tool to serve the purpose of an artful, intriguing girl! She could see it all now, but she could not understand why, if Miss Melfert had woven such a spell around her son, he should choose to remain at home instead of accompanying them upon their travels, where he could still have enjoyed her society. Perhaps, however, this was also a secret between them.

All this flashed through her brain with the rapidity of lightning, and she was terribly angry, though her indomitable pride gave her power to conceal it in a measure, but she resolved that if it was true the girl should suffer for her audacity in no light degree.

"No," she said, with an assumption of indifference, "my son did not mention the fact; he evidently did not consider it of sufficient moment to do so."

Adison Cheetham's eyes blazed at her reply, and at the

remembrance of the ignominious defeat he had suffered at the hands of this proud woman's son. His lips curled into their customary sinister smile when moved by anger, as he replied :

"He did, however, consider the matter of sufficient moment to defend the beautiful governess right valiantly, when she appealed to him for help against my authority over her."

If looks could have annihilated her visitor there would not have been much left of him by the time he was through speaking ; but it was vulgar to give vent to passion in words, and her ladyship replied only by asking a searching question.

"If this girl is your wife, as you claim, how is it that she is hiding from you and dependent upon her own exertions for maintenance?"

"Madam, she is not dependent. I am a gentleman, and I can give her every luxury."

"Why, then, is she hiding from you?" she repeated, sternly.

"She imagines that she has sustained some wrong at my hands ; but she is my wife, her place is in my home, and I cannot and will not longer be subjected to the mortification which I have for over a year endured on her account."

"What is the nature of the wrong which she imagines has been done her?"

"Pardon me, your ladyship, but I do not think it necessary to enter into particulars which can concern no one but ourselves," he replied, coolly, and the proud dame realized that she had found her match for *sang froid* and impudence.

"You will perceive," he continued, "that having found

my wife, I cannot, out of respect for myself, allow her to remain a governess longer in your family, nor, indeed, in any other."

Lady Fennelsea bowed, and smiled scornfully, as much as to say that she could have no desire to retain Miss Melfert's services under such very questionable circumstances.

"She *cannot* be a connection of *those* Radcliffes," she thought, "or she would never have conducted herself in such a manner."

But this man aroused all the antagonism of her nature, and she could not refrain from saying, with something of malice in her tones:

"It may all be as you say, but, even then, I do not see how you can compel this person to go with you, if she is unwilling to do so."

"This person!" Adison Cheetham showed his teeth at the implied disrespect; but he answered, with the utmost politeness and unconcern:

"If your ladyship will kindly send for Mrs. Cheetham, I think you will not need to remain in doubt much longer regarding the truth of my assertions. As to my wife accompanying me, that is a matter we will settle between ourselves."

Lady Fennelsea bowed stiffly, and with a very red face. This man, with his cool impudence and assumption of equality, upset her dignity as nothing had been able to do for many years.

With an expression of vindictiveness in her eyes, and of stern decision on her countenance, she rang the bell, and desired the servant to request Miss Melfert to come immediately to the parlor.

A sudden thought seemed to strike Adison Cheetham as

she delivered the message, and, with an air of humility and regret, he said :

“My lady, if I have said anything which may have seemed harsh, I pray you will overlook it, for truly my troubles have embittered me sadly ; and may I presume to ask your assistance and co-operation in regaining my wife?”

Lady Fennelsea regarded him a moment in surprise ; then, considerably mollified, she replied :

“If this girl is your wife, it will be no more than my duty to advise her to return to you.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

TIMELY HELP.

Pearle appeared greatly surprised upon receiving Lady Fennelsea's message, and an instinctive fear oppressed her that something was wrong, although her worst surmises did not approach anything so terrible as the ordeal through which she was about to pass.

She looked unspeakably lovely in the crisp, delicate blue lawn which she wore, with the tiny bands of blue velvet tied around her shining chestnut hair, and the half opened blush-roses which she had fastened in her belt and at her throat.

Her eyes were bright, and her cheeks were flushed with excitement ; and when she entered the parlor, Adison Cheetham caught his breath on beholding the vision of loveliness, and inwardly vowed that he would have her, no matter who or what opposed.

Pearle did not see him when she first entered the room, but she saw at once that something had happened to disturb her ladyship's serenity exceedingly. With the color rising higher in her cheeks, Pearle approached her, and asked :

"Did you send for me, Lady Fennelsea?"

"Yes, I did," she answered, with some asperity, for Pearle's loveliness only served to make her more angry and pitiless. "I sent for you that I might ascertain whether you are acquainted with this gentleman or not," and she waved her hand pompously toward the spot where her visitor sat, hungrily devouring with his eyes the beauty of the unconscious girl.

With a low exclamation of surprise, not unmixed with fear, Pearle turned and confronted him.

The next instant her face was blanched to the whiteness of paper, the old hunted look returned to her eyes, and she sank strengthless upon a chair.

"Do you know this gentleman?" Lady Fennelsea asked again, while anger and malice glowed in the eyes fixed so sternly and remorselessly upon the fair, sweet, but horror-stricken face.

Pearle was too overcome to reply, and merely bowed her head in token of assent.

"I desire to be answered when I ask a question," her ladyship said, with tightly compressed lips. "Do you know this—this man?"

She longed to say "this person," but something in those peculiar eyes opposite prevented her.

"Yes, madam," came weakly from Pearle's pale lips.

"Oh, you *do*, do you? Won't you please repeat his name to me? I fear I do not know how it should be pro-

nounced," returned the vindictive woman, with a scornful glance at the card she still held in her hand.

The poor girl glanced appealingly into her employer's face. She saw that she knew all; but there was no mercy depicted there.

"His name," her ladyship repeated, peremptorily.

"I refuse to utter it," Pearle answered, proudly, though she shuddered involuntarily.

"That is respectful, surely," was the sarcastic retort.

"Allow me to ask what relationship he bears to you?"

"Madam, he is nothing to me," and the gray eyes began to glow with a dangerous light—a light something like that which Adison Cheetham had seen in them on the morning of their marriage, after their return from the church.

"You may as well own to the truth," Lady Fennelsea said, sternly; "your agitation betrays more than you are aware of, perhaps. This man claims to be your husband, and now I command you to tell me truly whether your name is really Margaret Melfert, as you have led me to believe, or Mrs. Adison Cheet—Cheetham, as he states."

Again Pearle shuddered. The name, particularly as her ladyship had hesitatingly and gingerly pronounced it, had the most obnoxious sound to her. She never could—she never *would* answer to it. No moral obligation bound her to the man, and she then and there resolved to throw off the yoke that was so galling to her. She knew that he would persecute her as long as he had any legal right to call her his wife, and she determined to appeal at once to the courts for a decree of separation. She knew that the English laws were very strict regarding such matters, and she had no hope of ever being really free, so that happiness could come again to her—her conscience would not,

in fact, allow her to entertain any such hope as that; but she could at least seek protection from further persecution, and she would do it and bear the scandal rather than suffer as she was now suffering.

Lady Fennelsea's cold glance marked her drooping lids, her pale face and quivering lips, as she sat thinking this, and what she considered the guilty shrinking of the girl for having been detected in her deception, only hardened her the more.

"You are detaining me; I await your reply, Miss—Mrs.—" and she stopped, as if she really did not know how to address her.

Her sarcastic tones goaded Pearle to the verge of desperation. She arose and confronted the stern-visaged woman.

There was now no shadow of fear on the lovely face, no sign of shrinking in her manner, but, instead, an air of resolution and scorn that made her ladyship wonder at and almost quail before her.

"Madam," she began, with something of hauteur, "I repeat—this man is nothing to me morally; legally, I am bound to confess, he *has* a hold upon me."

"You acknowledge it, then? You are his wife—you do bear his name?"

"I am obliged to acknowledge it; but I was duped, cheated, and forced into it in the most monstrous manner," Pearle answered, with a shudder.

"You *were* married to him, then?" continued her inquisitor.

"Yes, madam."

"In the presence of witnesses?"

"Certainly."

"You went to the altar voluntarily with him, and took

upon yourself the vows which bind a wife to her husband?"

"No—a thousand times no!" burst forth Pearle, indignantly, and unable to bear with her patiently; she must justify herself. "I told you I was duped, cheated, and entrapped into this hated marriage. I was to have married a good, true man upon the very morning that I was driven into this union; but *he*"—making a slight gesture to indicate Adison Cheetham—"frightened me with threats. He cheated me with forged documents, which seemed capable of working the ruin of the man I loved; and, to save *him*, I sacrificed myself. I appeared to submit to the only alternative—I went to the altar with him. I stood before the vicar at this man's side, and was bound to him irrevocably; but I took no vows upon myself, I uttered no word to perjure my lips or my soul; I would not even sign my name as his wife upon the church register. I did this in order to purchase the proofs, as I believed, of my promised husband's dishonor, that I might save him from the consequences; and within an hour from the time the fatal words were spoken that bound me to him, I found that he had basely forged those proofs in order to carry out his nefarious purposes. In my misery, I vowed I would never remain in his presence one single hour, I would never live out the lie with which I had apparently perjured myself, and I fled from him and from all whom I loved. I determined to hide myself from the world where I had hitherto been known, and live out my miserable life alone."

Pearle stopped to regain her breath, for she was nearly exhausted with her excitement.

"You had no right to do as you have done. If you were so foolish as to allow yourself to be so deceived, you

should have been willing to abide by the consequences. You have ruined your character by leaving your husband and living separate from him, when you might have been honored as the wife of a respectable man," said Lady Fennelsea, coldly.

Pearle made a gesture of disgust.

"Madam, I have at least preserved my *self-respect* by the course I have pursued, whatever the code of honor may be in the circles which *you* frequent. Every principle of truth and virtue within me revolts against the sentiments you advance," she said, in tones of scorn.

"Really, Miss Melfert, or whatever I should call you, your manner is extremely insolent for one occupying the position you do in my family. However, under the circumstances, I shall overlook it; but I would advise you, if you value your future reputation, to yield submission and obedience to your husband, who really appears to be very respectably situated, and who says he can give you a good position in the world."

Had not Pearle been so utterly wretched, she would have laughed aloud with amusement at this absurdly patronizing speech and the woman's affectation of superiority.

Lady Fennelsea's family and pedigree were not more honorable than her own; her wealth and position were equal to, if indeed they did not exceed her ladyship's, while her education and accomplishments were far superior. This condescending patronage, this assumed pre-eminence, not to speak of her hard-hearted, worldly-wise advice, was ridiculous, to say the least.

Pearle's lips curled disdainfully, as she replied:

"Lady Fennelsea, it is to be regretted that your advice should be unavailing; but I would rather be houseless,

homeless, and as destitute as a beggar in the streets, than to humiliate myself to tolerate this man's presence for one single hour."

Adison Cheetham gnashed his teeth audibly at this resolute and spirited speech.

Lady Fennelsea hearing it, turned to him with an expression of horror.

"I fear you have taken unto yourself rather a refractory wife," she said; then turning again to Pearle, she resumed, with increasing severity: "It is useless for me now to dwell upon the inexcusable deception that you have presumed to practice upon me and my innocent family. Of course, now that I have discovered it, I can no longer consider you a fit companion for my daughters, a suitable governess for my children; consequently, I could, under no conditions, allow you to remain longer in my service. I trust, however, that you may be led to see your folly, and repent of it, before the patience of your husband is exhausted. I shall deem it advisable," she concluded, swelling with importance and indignation, "to warn my friends and acquaintances of the deception you have practiced upon me, that they may also avoid becoming the victims of your duplicity."

Upon concluding this annihilating speech, Lady Fennelsea arose majestically as if to leave the room.

But Pearle, feeling desperate at the thought of being left alone with that man, and without a friend to protect her from his power and fell designs, placed herself in her path.

"Your ladyship," she began, pleadingly, "you are a mother—you have daughters, and you ought to feel for one persecuted and wronged as I am and have been. I appeal to your sympathy and to your protection, until I

can communicate with my own friends, and then I will relieve you of my presence immediately."

In her eagerness and despair she bent toward the stately matron, her flushed face raised beseechingly, her lovely gray eyes fixed upon her immovable features, her hands clasped and outstretched imploringly.

Lady Fennelsea drew back haughtily; the exceeding beauty of her despised governess only seemed to harden her already hard heart still more. Not one of her own daughters gave promise of one-half the loveliness of this charming girl, and the thought angered her, and strengthened her prejudice and malice.

Unfortunate people had no business to be beautiful; that gift should only be bestowed upon the rich and prosperous.

"Miss Melfert, you are extremely presuming to suggest any such thing; it is not to be considered for a moment; *my* daughters must not be contaminated by pernicious influences. Come to me in half an hour and I will settle with you, and you will please vacate your room immediately."

This was uttered in the haughtiest accents; then, with a withering look of contempt into the beautiful, despairing face, and a cold bow to Adison Cheetham, she swept from the room.

The closing of the door after her sounded like the knell of doom to Pearle. For one moment she buried her face in her trembling hands, while her heart was lifted in silent appeal to the mighty One in whom she trusted, and then she too turned as if to leave the room.

But Adison Cheetham, who had been watching her intently, sprang before her and barred the way.

"I've been made a fool of about long enough," he said,

through his shut teeth. "You cannot leave this room until you consent to leave it to go home with me as my wife."

Pearle raised her head and turned upon him her scornful, defiant eyes, while she moved a step or two out of his way.

She had not spoken to him once, she had scarce looked at him; but now she was prepared to fight him upon equal ground, and defy him to the last.

But before she could reply to him, the door was suddenly and somewhat violently thrown open, and a kindly though excited face looked in upon them.

It was that of the gentleman whom Pearle had encountered during her walks, attending the invalid imbecile girl.

An expression of surprise swept over his features as he saw the couple within so defiantly facing each other; then, addressing Pearle, he said:

"Pardon me, lady, but it is quite important that I have a moment's speech with you."

"The lady is engaged, sir," Adison Cheetham began, insolently, and with an angry scowl at the intruder.

But Pearle, her heart bounding with thankfulness for this timely interruption, glided quickly to the young man's side, and deliberately taking his arm, said:

"Certainly, monsieur."

Her hand tightened over his arm almost convulsively, and he could feel that she was trembling in every limb.

He hesitated an instant, and seemed somewhat surprised at her act.

"Help me," she whispered, appealingly; and comprehending at once that she was in some deep trouble, and that this sinister-looking man was the cause of it, he led her without a word from the room, and closed the door

upon the discomfited and baffled husband, who cursed in no moderate manner at being thus balked at the moment when he thought the game was all in his own hands.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

UNRAVELING THE MYSTERY.

While the incidents related in the last chapter were transpiring, another strange scene was being enacted close by.

When Pearle went down to read to the ladies in their own room, she left Amy sleeping. She was better to-day; still Pearle did not feel quite free from anxiety on her account, and had persuaded her to lie down and have a nap.

She awoke soon after Pearle went below, and finding herself alone, ran into the adjoining room, where Fred and Clara were studying.

The maid, with whom both Pearle and Amy were great favorites, coaxed the little one to allow her to dress her, promising to take her for a little walk afterward.

The child, pleased with the prospect, consented, and was soon arrayed in dainty garments of spotless white, with a broad silken sash of blue tied around her waist, and a little hat trimmed with ribbons of the same hue, set jauntily upon her golden head.

She was as witching a little fairy as ever drew breath, and the maid was vastly more proud of her, a friendless waif though she seemed, than she had ever been of either Fred or Clara, as she strolled with her through the grounds

and noted the glance of admiration that everywhere followed her.

They walked about for half an hour or so, when, drawing near a rustic arbor, they heard a deep, rich voice singing a popular ballad.

Amy, a dear lover of music, stopped to listen ; then, with one chubby finger upon her lips, and her other hand outstretched to the maid to enjoin silence, she stole on tip-toe to the entrance and stood, shyly, looking within.

A moment she stood thus, and the maid saw a look of mingled recognition, amazement, and terror creep into her large, blue eyes ; the color faded from her little face, leaving her as white as a snowflake ; then, with a wild scream, she darted inside the inclosure, and the next instant was sobbing, and laughing, and talking in the strangest and most unintelligible manner imaginable.

The girl hastened after her, but before she could reach the spot, she heard a piercing shriek from some one there, and when she at last stood in the door-way, a strange scene presented itself before her.

A pale, beautiful woman was lying back in an invalid chair, wholly unconscious, her white face outlined against the rich dark velvet, in striking contrast to it ; while Amy, quivering with excitement, was clinging to her in a passion of tears and sobs, and calling out : “ Mamma, mamma—you’ve been gone so long ; please, *please* kiss Amy.”

A gentleman had sprung to her side, and was regarding the unconscious woman with great anxiety, while he strove to unclasp Amy’s clinging arms from her neck and put her away ; but she refused to be moved, only clinging the closer, and begging in the most piteous manner for “ mamma to wake up and kiss her.”

The woman was the one whom Pearle had met so often

of late in her rambles, and the gentleman was her attendant.

"Take her away," he commanded the maid, and she took Amy by main force into her arms, in spite of her cries and screams, and carried her from the place.

The gentleman rolled his unconscious charge back to the steps of the hotel, where, gathering her slight form in his arms, he bore her up to her room, while the maid bore Amy to a distant part of the grounds, trying in vain to hush her cries and sobs.

For more than an hour the sick girl lay unconscious; she would partially revive, only to relapse into another and more prolonged fainting turn, while both the young man and the woman whom Pearle had supposed to be his mother, watched and worked over her with increasing anxiety.

"I am afraid she will die—what has caused this?" the woman asked of her son, as the invalid relapsed into the fifth swoon.

He shook his head, but made no other reply, as he worked over his charge with restoratives, and counted her pulse every other minute.

At last his efforts seemed to be rewarded; she gave signs of returning life, and there was a strange, eager glance in the man's eyes, as, with almost breathless interest, he waited to see what would come next.

With a long drawn sigh the white lids at length fluttered open, and the dark eyes wandered from face to face inquiringly, and then around the room.

There was no look of recognition as she caught the eyes of those bending so anxiously over her—it was as if she had never seen them before, and a puzzled expression seemed to change her whole countenance.

"Where am I?—where is she?" she asked at last.

"Whom?" queried the young man, bending nearer to her, and searching those dark eyes with almost breathless anxiety.

"My baby—my darling—my precious pet," and her sweet lips quivered painfully; the weak voice was plaintively eager and tremulous.

The elder woman was about to exclaim and appeared greatly excited, but the young man stopped her with an imperative motion of his hand, as he answered the girl in a matter-of-fact way.

"She is here—I will bring her to you. Drink this first, for you have been ill and must get a little strength."

He gently lifted her head from the pillow, and put a glass to her lips, from which she drank thirstily.

Whatever the mixture was, it seemed to produce the desired effect, for she seemed to breathe more easily and regularly, and a slight tinge of color returned to her lips.

Still her glance wandered inquiringly around the room, and finally settled upon the young man's face again with the same look.

"It's all very strange!" she said, with a long-drawn sigh. "I wasn't killed—I shall live after all; are you a physician?"

"Yes, I am a physician," he answered, smiling assuringly, "and you will live; but you must be very quiet, for you have been terribly frightened."

"Frightened!" she whispered, a wild look creeping into her eyes, and a shudder shaking her slight frame. "Oh, yes, you never can know—it was horrible!—horrible! But my baby—I want my child, just to make sure that I am not dreaming," she concluded, and becoming greatly excited again.

The young man's brow contracted with perplexity, and

there was an exceedingly anxious look in his face, as if he was pondering some doubtful question.

"Go find that little girl that we have noticed so often, and bring her here," he said in a low tone to his mother; and without a word she went to do his bidding.

"Who is she?" asked the invalid as her glance followed the retreating form.

"My mother," he answered, briefly, and then held another potion of medicine to her lips.

She took it as if she felt perfect confidence in him, though she seemed to search his face curiously, and then the room, as if it seemed strange to her; while all this time she appeared to be listening intently, and starting nervously at the sound of every footfall in the corridor.

At length the door softly opened, and madam entered, leading the little white-robed fairy by the hand, and followed by the maid.

Amy's eyes were red and tear-swollen, and heart-broken sobs every now and then shook her little form, though she tried to repress them, for she had been told that she must be very quiet if she went in to see the sick lady.

As they entered, the invalid raised herself on her elbow, her cheeks flushing a vivid crimson, her eager eyes shining like two stars.

There was a moment of intense, painful silence, then her lips parted with a low cry of delight—she held out her wasted hands, and the child sprang to her, and was clasped to her bosom with an almost hysterical sob.

"Mamma's pet—Amy darling, my beautiful snowflake," she murmured fondly, as the tears rained over her face, and dropped among the golden curls upon her breast. "God is good," she went on, hugging the little form closer. "He did not tell me to die—He heard me when

I prayed that you, my precious, need not be left to the cold charity of the world—glory be to His holy n——”

The excitement was too much ; the blanching lips could say no more ; the feeble hands relaxed their passionate clasp ; the flush died out of the fair face, and she lay white and lifeless once more in another swoon.

Even then it was almost impossible to persuade Amy to leave her. She clung to her almost frantically, crying :

“ It is—it is my own, *own* mamma. I will not go away.”

They told her that her mamma was sick—that she need not go away, but she must keep very quiet, and it was pitiful to see the grieved, frightened look upon her little face, and her efforts to hush her sobs as she watched them working over the apparently lifeless form.

The swoon proved to be nothing serious this time, and a half hour later, with little Amy’s hand clasped in hers, the sick one fell into a quiet and refreshing slumber.

Then the young physician drew the child gently away, and told her when her mamma awoke she should come and see her again ; and the maid took her back to Pearle’s room, having, however, been cautioned by the young man to say nothing of what she had witnessed until he should see Miss Melfert, whom she had told him had care of the child.

Then the doctor sought his mother, a strange, glad light in his eyes, his whole face, in fact, fairly radiant with gladness.

“ It is as I thought,” he said ; “ that terrible shock deprived her of her reason, and now a shock as sudden, although of a different nature, has restored it.”

“ My son, you do not mean to say that you think she

has regained her reason?" she said in tones of astonishment.

"I have every encouragement to believe so. You saw the change in her looks, her tones; and we have never heard her speak as connectedly as she has done during the last hour, since we have had the care of her."

"N-o; and yet her words have only seemed another form of madness or idiocy to me. How very, very strange that she should claim that child as belonging to her."

"Not more strange than that the child should appear to recognize its mother in her," quickly replied the young man, then added, gravely: "I believe we are on the verge of having a deep mystery explained. I will go at once to seek the young lady who appears to have charge of the child, and relate what has occurred to her. Meantime I can trust you to watch our patient closely, and if she should arouse, give her another spoonful of that mixture in the tumbler."

And this is how it happened that the young physician came to Pearle's aid in the strangely providential manner in which he did.

As he was descending the stairs he met Lady Fennelsea, who was returning to her rooms, nearly bursting with indignation at having discovered how she had been duped, and he inquired of her where he could find her governess.

"I left her in the reception-parlor," she replied, with freezing dignity, and passed on, while with quick, eager strides the young man proceeded to the room designated, and opened the door just in season to relieve Pearle from the trying position in which she found herself placed.

"Oh! thank you," she breathed, when the door was shut, and he was leading her toward the stair-way, but she

was trembling so that he feared he was going to have another patient on his hands.

"Have you been frightened? Has any one dared to offer you an indignity? I am a stranger to you, but I can never see a lady wronged, and not seek to defend her," he said, his face flushing, while he half turned back, as if he was ready to go and pommel the offender if she said so.

"No, no," she said, eager to get away, lest the man from whom she had first fled should come after her; "but I have been excessively annoyed, and I have to thank you for coming to my rescue just as you did."

He gave her a searching glance, as if wondering what he had rescued her from, and what relation that sinister-looking man bore to her; but remembering that he had other matters of importance to talk about, he said:

"I am glad if I have relieved you from anything unpleasant, but I came to ask if you can spare me half an hour, as I have something of great importance to communicate to you."

It was Pearle's turn to look surprised now, but she replied, though with some bitterness, as she remembered that no one had any claim upon her time now:

"Yes, an hour, if you like; only please take me away where there will be no danger of my encountering the man we have just left. You will please excuse the liberty I have taken," she added, coloring, as she became conscious that she was still clinging to the arm she had so unceremoniously laid hold upon; "but when you opened the door, I was led involuntarily to feel that I could trust you, and I was sorely in need of help at that moment."

He bowed, and then led her up stairs to a little private parlor belonging to the suit he occupied, where he com-

municated to her the strange events that had occurred during the last few hours.

"You amaze me!" she exclaimed. "You say that Amy first recognized your—your friend"—this with an inquiring glance, for he had not mentioned what relationship he bore to the invalid—"as her mother, and that she, on recovering from her swoon, recognized the child, and called her Amy?"

"Yes; the recognition was mutual."

"I do not understand it at all. Who is this woman?"

"I do not know who she is," he returned, looking very grave.

"*You do not know?*" cried Pearle, aghast, and for a moment she was tempted to think that the man also was bereft of sense or reason.

"No," he returned, sadly. "I do not wonder that you are astonished, and the whole thing is a tantalizing mystery. Fate threw this unfortunate girl—for she does not seem more than that—into my care more than a year ago."

"Ah!" exclaimed Pearle, starting violently.

"Yes; I will explain it to you soon; but first, I would like to ask one or two questions of you. I have been told that this little one who is in your care is an orphan—is it so?"

"Yes; or I have *supposed* that she is an orphan, for accident deprived her of her mother just before she fell into my hands, and I was led to believe that her father was not living."

"You say that an *accident* deprived her of her mother—what *kind* of an accident?" the young physician asked, abruptly, scarce waiting for her to complete her sentence; and the beating of the full veins upon his forehead told how anxiously he awaited her reply.

"A railway accident," Pearle replied, and she saw him start, and his face flush a deep crimson.

"Will you tell me when, where, and how it occurred?" he asked, in suppressed tones; and, feeling strangely moved by his manner, she related all that she knew concerning the sad event that had made Amy motherless.

"Was the woman's body reclaimed?" he asked, when she had concluded, she not having referred to that repulsive feature of the bereavement.

"No, it was not; and that is the saddest part of the whole story. It was never discovered who took it from the morgue in London, and it remains a mystery even now." And she went on to explain how Madam Renau, by being prostrated by the fatal news of her daughter's death, had been unable to go to identify the body until several days after the accident, and had then found that it had been claimed and taken away.

The young man had grown very pale and excited during her recital, and did not seem to know how to break the silence for several seconds after she had finished. At last he said, and his voice was almost hoarse with emotion:

"Strange things happen in this world of ours!—*I claimed that body, and took it from the morgue!*"

"You!" cried Pearle in a whisper of horror; then some thought seemed to startle her, and she continued: "And—and—she is——"

She could not go on; she half arose from her chair, bending eagerly toward him, her beautiful face white as snow, her voice shaking with emotion.

"Yes, I claimed it," he went on, as though she had not interrupted, "although I am of no kin to her, although I had never even seen her until I saw her lying dead—killed, as everybody supposed, by that express train, as it thundered

on its way to London. Sit down, my dear young lady. You are excited, you are trembling; but be calm, and I will tell you all about it."

Pearle sank back into her chair trembling indeed, and almost faint at this startling intelligence, while her mind went sadly back to that forlorn household in the suburbs of London, into which she had gone and where she had closed the eyes of that stricken, sorrowing mother in her last sleep, and then found herself, as she had supposed, the only guardian of a helpless orphan.

And this man, who had claimed this body, who was he? Madam Renau had said there was only one person in the world who would have a right to do such a thing; could this man be the one? No, it could not be, for only a moment ago he had said he did not know who she was. It was all passing strange, and she was very much excited over it.

CHAPTER XL.

THE DOCTOR'S STORY.

"Before I begin my story," the young doctor began, "allow me to introduce myself to you. My name is George Murdock; I am a physician, and my residence is in London, where I have been practicing for the last five years; how I happen to be here just at this time, you will soon learn. I suppose, according to the laws of our country, I have been guilty of a very wrong thing; and yet, in doing what I have done, I was actuated only by the most humane feelings.

"It has been my practice during my residence in London to visit the morgue whenever I heard of an unusual accident, hoping to increase my stock of information thereby and benefit other sufferers. Hearing of the railway casualty which occurred more than a year ago, and to which, you have referred, I visited the morgue early the following morning, and found the body of the girl who had been the only victim. I cannot describe to you my feelings as I looked upon the lovely unfortunate. A strange thrill went tingling through all my nerves, and a feeling of bitter rebellion arose in my heart against the sad fate that had slain her and sent her to that place to be gazed upon by the idle and curious.

"It was early, as I said. I was the first one who had come there that morning, for which I have always been thankful; for, I fear, I should never have had the nerve to do what I did in the presence of a prying throng. I went alone into the room where she lay, so white and still, and so delicately beautiful, and stood gazing upon her, wondering who she could be, and if the news of her untimely end would reach her friends and they come to claim her, before she should begin to grow hideous and repulsive. She lay as if asleep. Her abundant hair had become loosened, and rippled over her shoulders and bosom in great, luxuriant waves, and was as smooth and glossy as satin. Her face was rounded and full, and very, very fair to look upon, excepting a bruise far up on one side of the forehead. Her lips were slightly parted, showing the even rows of white teeth between, and one hand rested upon her breast; the other lay by her side, and I noticed upon the third finger of this a broad band of gold.

" 'She has been married,' I said to myself; and then I observed that she was clad in black—her dress and mantle,

also her bonnet and veil, which lay beside her, were all black. 'A young widow, perhaps,' I thought, though there was no crape to indicate deep mourning; and then the feeling impressed me that perhaps she had no friends, perhaps she was alone in the world; she might even be one of those unfortunate ones who, discouraged with life and rendered desperate by its troubles, had sought her own death.

"I involuntarily took in mine one of the soft, white hands, which seemed like wax outlined against the deep black of her dress; and it was a beautifully shaped hand. To my surprise, it was not rigid, as I had expected to find it, but soft and pliable almost as my own; and, as I looked, a thrill like the piercing of a knife shot through me—one of the slender fingers twitched!

"'It is but the result of my imagination,' I said, chiding myself for becoming so unduly excited; but even as I said it, my own fingers sought her pulse. My heart bounded into my throat, and a terrible trembling seized me as I felt it feebly vibrate beneath my touch. 'She is not dead,' I whispered, feeling my own face blanch, and a cold perspiration starting out all over me.

"No; she was not dead, for still holding that wrist, I could feel the faint pulsations that had startled me so. But I knew she *would* die unless she had immediate and vigorous treatment. My first impulse was to notify the authorities, and have her taken to the hospital; but the hospital was a long distance from the morgue, the officials would have no interest in the case, and there might be a long delay that would be fatal to the faint promise of life in that almost lifeless form. No one had come to claim the body; indeed, her friends might be living a long distance from London, even if she had any; if I left her

there and said nothing, I should go away feeling guilty of murder. Whatever I did I must do quickly, and it was then, on the impulse of the moment, that I resolved to do a bold thing. I never once stopped to consider what the consequences would be if my act was discovered. I only thought of bringing back life to that beautiful, unknown girl, whose face had impressed me as no other had ever done.

"I went out to the authorities and claimed her as mine—my sister; and I think they never once doubted my word, for my white face and trembling tones had all the appearance of grief and horror over a fate so terrible to a relative. I have often been troubled since, when thinking of the distress of the real friends should any come to claim her, but I have never for one moment regretted the step I took.

"I had her conveyed at once to my own humble home, where, after relating my story to my mother, she joined me heart and hand in my efforts to resuscitate the apparently lifeless girl. We were rewarded, after long and arduous labor; suspended animation was restored; the girl breathed, moved, and swallowed the restoratives we gave her, but showed no signs of consciousness. A tedious brain fever followed this, and many times we despaired of her life; but my mother is an excellent nurse, and to her our patient owes her life. It was a tough struggle, however, between life and death; but she had evidently been in perfect health at the time of the accident, and she had also a strong and vigorous constitution, so that she at last rallied and began to recover physically; but, to my dismay, I found that her reason was wrecked—she was an idiot!

"I could not account for it at first; the bruise upon her

head had not been severe enough to cause either death or idiocy; there were no other injuries that were very severe, and her sickness could not have produced any such fatal results. In only one way, I reasoned, could it have been caused, and that must have been the shock and fright she experienced on perceiving, as she supposed, that she must be killed.

"She has been very sweet and attractive in her imbecility; there has been nothing repulsive about her condition. She has never been strong since her sickness, and demands constant care and attention; but she has been so sweetly patient, gentle, and lovable, that my mother and I have grown to love her most tenderly. I have had a theory of my own all through her illness, although I have never given expression to it until to-day. I have read of instances where imbecility was caused by some shock or fright, and the recovery was produced in a like manner. A great shock had deprived our charge—May we have called her—of her reason, and I have felt that it was barely possible that something of this kind might restore it again. To-day an event occurred which has led me to hope that such is indeed the case."

"Is it possible?" interrupted Pearle, with almost breathless interest. "Oh! I hope so, if—can it be possible that she is Amy's mother?"

"Wait until I tell you the rest of my story, Miss Melfert, before you allow yourself to hope too much," the young doctor said, with a kindly smile into her excited face. "I took my fair charge out this afternoon, and we went to a little arbor at the end of the south walk. She had been nervous all day—she has nervous attacks occasionally, which leave her quite weak, and it is often very difficult to quiet her; sometimes by singing to her we can

soothe her very quickly, and so I have grown into the habit of singing to her frequently. To-day I was only half through my song when I was startled by something white darting past me, with a cry that made every nerve in me tingle, and the next moment I saw a little golden-haired child spring into the lap of my patient, and fall sobbing and crying upon her bosom.

"May uttered a piercing shriek, and fainted dead away; but the little one, seeming to be nearly wild, continued kissing her lips, patting her pale cheeks, and calling 'Mamma! mamma!'"

"Amy," murmured Pearle, feeling faint herself, as she began to realize toward what all this tended.

"Yes, it was the little girl whom I have often seen with you; but I could not stop to inquire into the cause of her grief and strange actions then. I gave her into the care of the maid, who just then came for her, and brought May directly back to the hotel. She had received a fearful shock, for she kept relapsing into fainting fits for more than an hour, and I was beginning to fear for the result, when she revived, and I was instantly startled by remarking a strange look in her eyes. It was not the look of confidence and trust that she usually regarded me with, but a curious, puzzled expression, as though she did not know me, and almost immediately she began glancing anxiously about the room, and asked for her 'baby,' her 'Amy,' her 'precious pet.'

"I was almost as much agitated at this as I was when, in the morgue, I first saw her finger twitch and knew that she was not dead. I realized that my theory was correct. This shock, I believe, has restored the reason which I had feared must be forever clouded. At first I hardly knew what to do. I could not believe that this child was really

hers; I thought it might be a singular coincidence of resemblance, and I almost feared to send for her again, at her request, lest a disappointment should produce a relapse into her former state.

"I expressed no surprise at her questions regarding the little one, and, when I thought her strong enough to bear it, I sent for her. I was not left in doubt long, for the moment the door opened, little Amy bounded to the bedside, and mother and child again recognized each other.

"I cannot tell you how this strange occurrence has affected me," Dr. Murdock continued, with emotion. "I am deeply grateful for this change in my patient—grateful, too, that she will be restored to the friends who love her, and that the mystery which has so long enveloped her will now be cleared away; and yet, she has grown so dear to my mother and—to me, that it will be very hard for us to part with her."

There was a huskiness in George Murdock's voice as he concluded, and a mist like unshed tears in his eyes.

"Heaven be thanked!" Pearle ejaculated, "my darling is no longer motherless;" and she almost sobbed with joy that the terrible mystery which had so long shrouded beautiful Alice Renau was at last solved. But how strangely solved!

"Yes," returned the doctor; "it is certainly a matter to be deeply grateful for. As soon as I deemed it safe to leave my charge, I came to seek you, hoping that you would be able to throw some light on the subject. Do you know anything of her past history beyond what you have already told me?" he asked, with considerable anxiety.

"No, nothing of any moment," Pearle answered; and then she told him how she happened to go to Madam

Renau, of her sojourn there, of the old lady's death, and her subsequent adoption of little Amy.

"You have done a noble deed, Miss Melfert, in caring for this motherless child," Dr. Murdock said, with a glance of admiration, when she concluded; then, the look of anxiety returning to his face, he asked: "Did you say that May—that Amy's mother was a widow?"

"No; I learned nothing of her private history; but from the fact of madam's telling me that the little one was called Amy Renau, I judged that her mother must have been a son's wife, although madam never spoke of a son, and the servants knew nothing about it. There seemed to be something rather mysterious about the family," Pearle replied.

The doctor looked grave, but, after a thoughtful silence, he said, with a sort of regretful smile:

"I am afraid you and I will have cause to regret much, as well as to be thankful for much, when we are called to part with our charges."

"Yes, indeed," Pearle replied, the tears starting quickly to her eyes again. "I have grown to love Amy as well as if she really belonged to me; in fact, I had come to regard her as mine, as I had despaired of ever finding any one to whom she belonged."

"She is a charming little fairy. I had supposed, until a day or two ago, that she belonged to the family with whom you are engaged," said the doctor.

Pearle's face fell at these words, for they at once brought back to her mind her own precarious situation, which, in listening to the physician's tale, she had entirely forgotten for the time.

George Murdock noticed her troubled manner, and at once connected it in his mind with her interview with the

man whom he had seen in the reception-parlor, but of course he did not wish to appear curious, and so waited for her to break the silence. He knew she wanted to speak of it, from the anxious glance she cast at him every now and then.

"Would you like to come in and see my fair charge?" he asked, at last, to break the awkward pause.

Pearle started, and at once became violently agitated.

"Yes," she said; "but—but, Dr. Murdock, I find myself in a very trying position just at this time. My interview with you has inspired me with confidence in you, and though I know you have care enough on your mind just now, I feel impelled to trespass still further upon your kindness, and throw myself upon your protection until I can communicate with my friends."

He gave her a frank look of sympathy, as he replied:

"Anything that I can do to serve you, Miss Melfert, you may be assured I shall be most happy to do."

"Thank you; you are very kind, and I must tell you the truth, for you will doubtless learn it in some other way if I do not. It seems a strange thing that a woman should be obliged to seek protection against her own husband, but such is the fact. The man whom you saw in the parlor with me, I am compelled to acknowledge, stands in that relation to me," Pearle explained, with drooping eyes and crimson cheeks.

She did not think it right to allow him to remain in ignorance of this fact, though it was terribly humiliating to her to confess it.

"Ah!" he said, with a start of surprise. He had not once thought that she could be a wife.

"Yes; and I have been trying to hide from him for a long time." Then thinking he might wonder why she did

not claim the protection of Lady Fennelsea, she continued : " He has followed me here, and has had an interview with Lady Fennelsea, who, upon discovering the fact of which I have just spoken, considers that I am no longer fit for the position which I have hitherto occupied, and she has accordingly dismissed me. I was feeling very miserable and forlorn indeed when you sought me so opportunely."

She then proceeded briefly to give him some account of her trouble, and the exceedingly uncomfortable position in which she now found herself.

"You need protection surely," he said, when she concluded, "and you shall have it until you can communicate with your friends, which—pardon me for the suggestion—I should advise you to do at once. You are not fitted to combat single-handed with such villains as the one whom you have described."

"Thank you. The world seems very large, but it really is exceedingly small when one wants to hide one's self. If I am to lose Amy I shall need comfort, and I believe I shall go back to my brother's care—at least for the present," the lonely girl said, with quivering lips and tear-laden eyes.

The young doctor felt for her deeply ; she was so beautiful, and he had never dreamed of her having so tragic a history.

"Shall I demand an interview with—that man, and acquaint him with the fact that I have taken you under the shadow of my wing, and warn him of the consequences if he attempts to molest you?" he asked, trying to speak lightly.

"I do not believe that will be necessary," she answered. "I only wish to feel that I may appeal to you in case he

should seek to compel me to accompany him from this place."

"Very well; then consider yourself one of my family until your friends come for you; and now will you come and see Amy's mother?"

Pearle assented, and he led the way into another room, where they met Mrs. Murdock, whose motherly face had attracted Pearle from the first. The doctor introduced them, and asked after his charge.

"She is very comfortable," was the reply, "but in a state of curiosity regarding both herself and the little one, who, she declares, has grown half since she saw her; and," his mother added, smiling, "she does not know what to make of either you or me."

"We will soon explain all that to her," her son returned; and drawing Pearle's arm within his, he drew her into a chamber beyond, where the fair invalid lay, very pale and wan, but looking, nevertheless, a perfect picture of happiness and beauty, as she hugged to her bosom her newly recovered treasure, and looked down, with the light of reason and recognition once more in her beautiful brown eyes, into the deep blue orbs of this her child, who, with her little arms twined lovingly around her neck, would not consent to be taken from her mother.

CHAPTER XLI.

DR. MURDOCK'S LOVE FOR ALICE.

As the door opened, and Pearle entered the room with the doctor, Amy cried out joyously, her cheeks flushed with excitement, her eyes dancing with happiness:

"Auntie! auntie!—mamma—my own pretty mamma has come back!"

Pearle with difficulty restrained her tears at the words, for they told her but too surely that ere long she and her bright little comforter must part company.

But she withdrew her arm from that of her escort, and going directly to the bedside she knelt down so that she could look into those deep brown eyes which were now fixed so earnestly and questioningly upon her.

"Are you Alice Renau?" she asked, gently, but an intense earnestness quivered in her tones.

"Yes, that was—is my name," the fair stranger answered; but she looked greatly surprised at the question, and put her hand to her head in a puzzled way, as if trying to recall something, while a vivid crimson stained her cheek as she met the eager look bent upon her.

"And are you sure that Amy—this little one is your child?" Pearle continued.

"Yes; my very, *very* own," returned the young mother, in trembling tones, as she clasped the little form closer to her.

Then becoming excited by the vivid memories that seemed to come crowding upon her, she cried, with blanching cheeks, and a look of horror leaping to her eyes:

"Oh! that dreadful engine—those shrill, piercing whistles—those thundering noises—that terrible shock and fright that held me spell-bound to meet my death! I could not move—I could not speak nor cry out—I could only stand, and look, and wait, while that shrieking monster came nearer and nearer, until it sent me down, down into the blackness of darkness! Ah! it was dreadful—it was maddening!—but I could not move—I was

frozen, paralyzed. 'My baby—my baby! who will care for my darling?' was the one thought that burst my heart and scared my brain when, as I believed, I was dropping into eternity."

Her voice died away into a hoarse whisper, while exhausted with excitement and the fearful remembrance, she lay sobbing and wringing her hands wildly; and then clasping Amy to her convulsively, again kissing her shining head, and murmuring fond, wild words over her.

George Murdock regarded her with an anxious look on his face.

He went to her with an air of resolution, and unclasping her clinging arms put Amy into Pearle's lap, she having seated herself in a chair by the bed when she saw the invalid becoming so excited.

"Alice," he said, in gentle, yet authoritative tones, and using her name for the first time, "you must be quiet; you must not think of what is past, for it excites you so; you must be calm or I shall be obliged to send Amy and every one else from the room."

His manner seemed to re-assure her, and she grew quieter almost immediately, though deep sobs still shook her slight frame.

Dr. Murdock mixed something in a spoon and held it to her lips.

She took it obediently, and then looking up into his manly face with a puzzled expression, she asked, simply:

"Who are you? I have never seen you before, and yet it seems as if I have dreamed of you very often."

A look of pain shot into his eyes at this—he had watched and tended her so long; he had studied night and day that he might know how to treat her case; he had devoted every spare moment to her, and she had clung to

him with almost childish dependence during the months of her mental weakness; and now, when what he had always desired was accomplished, she did not even recognize him.

He knew that he had no right to expect anything different—that the “May,” whom his voice alone could soothe in her nervous hours, and the Alice of the present moment, were entirely different beings; and yet the knowledge brought with it a pang that he had never looked for.

“I am your physician,” he said, in reply to her question, “and I cannot allow you to talk any more, unless you are very quiet. This lady beside you is Miss Melfert, and she has had the care of Amy during your illness—for you have been sick for a long time.”

“Is that why my head feels so strangely—why I cannot think of all I wish?” she asked, putting both her trembling hands to her temples.

“Yes, and you will not be able to think at all unless you heed what I say. I thought you would like to be assured that Amy had been well cared for, and if you will promise not to become excited again, I will allow Miss Melfert to talk to you awhile,” the young doctor said, watching her closely all the time he was speaking.

“What is your name? were you called when I was hurt? Dr. Ashley was my mother’s physician——”

She stopped suddenly, while a look of remembrance and anxiety settled over her face. She was about to go on, but Dr. Murdock, seeing the look, interrupted:

“My name is George Murdock; I found you after you were hurt, and that is how you happen to be under my care.”

But he could not check the tide of memories that came

rushing back to her, now that the natural vigor of her brain was beginning to be restored.

"My mother! where is my mother?" she cried, starting up and resting upon her elbow, and without appearing to heed what he had said, as she recalled another of the cares that had been hers before the great darkness came upon her.

Pearle grew pale, and cast an appealing glance at the young physician.

He answered it with a warning look, and then quietly replied:

"It is well with madam, your mother, and everything that has occurred during your illness shall be explained to you, if you will have patience."

"I will be patient," she answered, submissively; then, holding out her arms again, she added, with a hysterical sob that was half a laugh: "But give me back my pet; Amy, come to mamma, and let me hold you close, or I cannot believe that I am not dead—*dead!* oh, it was so horrible!"

She began weeping nervously again, and the physician looked exceedingly anxious.

"She must not talk any more to-day," he said, decidedly, and he motioned to his mother and Pearle to leave the room.

He then laid Amy upon the bed beside her mother, bidding her be very quiet, and after a half hour of utter silence, during which he sat by the bed-side, making gentle passes over the brow of his patient, he had the satisfaction of seeing both mother and child fall into a peaceful slumber.

Meantime, Pearle related all that she knew of their history to Mrs. Murdock, and afterward something of her

own sad story, and the persecution and trouble that had that day overtaken her; and the matron's kind heart went out to the fair girl in tenderest sympathy.

"You shall be one of us, dear," she said, kissing her flushed and tearful cheek; "that bad man shall not annoy you; we will protect you until your own friends come to care for you."

Pearle felt greatly comforted by this promise of care, and made up her mind to write at once for her brother to come for her. The thought of giving up Amy, who had been such a comfort to her, nearly broke her heart; and the idea of going into another family as governess to receive the slights and insults which she had experienced during her residence with Lady Fennelsea, with no one to love or cheer her, was so repulsive to her that she decided she could not bear it.

So long a time had elapsed since the day that had ruined her life, that she felt assured that the scandal consequent upon it must have died away before this; and she resolved that she would go back now to Ashton Manor, where she could live as secluded as she chose.

"I will go home," she said to herself, while considering the matter, "and devote myself to my brother's children. I can do much toward making them happy; I can direct their education and help form their characters; and besides, there are many poor people in whom I can interest myself, and thus fill my life with usefulness. I will petition for a decree of separation; I will be free from all further annoyance from that tyrant, and, under Allstone's protection, I may, perhaps, be able to learn something of content."

After leaving Madam Murdock, she had an interview with the clerk of the hotel, with the intention of changing

her room, as Lady Fennelsea had directed, and taking one near Dr. Murdock's suite; but there was none to be obtained just then, and she was therefore obliged to remain where she was for the present.

She was inexpressibly sad and lonely upon retiring that night. Amy was still with her mother, who would not allow her to go from her sight, and Pearle missed the little form that had heretofore nestled so contentedly in her arms, and been so much company for her.

The next day Alice Renau appeared much better and stronger. She was much more composed, and her mind worked more quietly and rationally.

When Pearle was admitted to her she received her very affectionately, drawing her down to her and kissing her gratefully.

"I have been asking Amy a great many questions this morning, Miss Melfert, and I know how kind you must have been to her to have gained her love so completely. She tells me, too," she went on, the tears rolling quietly over her cheeks, "that my mother is gone. I begin to realize that a long time has elapsed since my accident, but the most that I can think of just now is your tender care for my child."

"It has been a very sweet care—a great comfort, too—to me," Pearle answered, drawing Amy into her arms and kissing her tenderly. "Indeed," she added, tears springing to her own eyes, "I find it very hard to be reconciled to the thought of giving her up, even to her own mother."

"Will you begin at the very beginning and tell me all?" Alice asked, gravely, and trying not to betray how very anxious she was to learn all about the past, which had been so dark to her.

Pearle complied, beginning with what she had learned

of her own disappearance, before she went to live with Madam Renau. She passed over as lightly as she could all the difficulties which had beset her path while she had the care of that forlorn household, giving as good an account as she truthfully could of madam's sickness and death, mentioning gratefully Dr. Ashley's kindness and assistance, and speaking last of her own affection for Amy, her aversion of giving her up to the care of strangers, and her final resolve to adopt her.

"I shall love you as long as I live," the young mother said, reaching out her hands and drawing Pearle to her again, her face quivering with gratitude. "Your patience, your charity, your tenderness have been almost divine, and in my thankfulness I could almost serve as your bondswoman all my life. To think that you should have had all that care of my mother, and that after that you should have actually toiled for my child's daily bread."

"Do not speak of it, please," Pearle interrupted.

"I must speak of it. Do you think that I, her mother, would let it pass, and *not* tell you how I love and honor you for it?" she asked, with brimming eyes and quivering lips. "But," she added, with a little smile into Amy's wonderful face, "my pet here is really quite an heiress, in spite of her apparently destitute condition, and she shall make it all up to her kind friend four-fold. Miss Melfert," she went on, her face brightening with a sudden thought, "you have said that you cannot bear to give Amy up, and since you have had to—to work for her and yourself, you surely cannot have much to bind you elsewhere. Won't you come and live with us—we shall be all alone now—in some quiet place that we shall choose when I am a little stronger?"

Pearle smiled slightly to think that she should be re-

garded as destitute; she was nevertheless deeply touched by this kind thought for her, and answered, with thanks, that she would have duties that would now call her another way; but she should always feel that a common bond united them, and she would gladly spend a portion of every year with them if she desired.

"I do desire it," Alice Renau said, eagerly, "and I shall always cling to you as a dear friend. I am very much alone in the world. Only Amy and I are left of all my family, and aside from the pleasure I shall take in rearing my little daughter, the future holds but very little to tempt me."

"Ah! her husband is dead then. She *was* once a wife!" thought Pearle, glancing sorrowfully at the delicate woman who seemed to be so friendless.

"But," Alice resumed, heaving a deep sigh, as if she was crushing some burden back into her heart, "I suppose I must talk business with you a little. It is necessary for me to understand where to begin life again. You say that Dr. Ashley allowed you to store my household goods over his stable?"

"Yes, he was very kind in many ways. He said he would care for them, and very generously refused to accept any remuneration for any of his services."

Alice colored at this.

"He shall not go unrewarded, however," she said, a little proudly; then asked, somewhat anxiously: "Miss Melfert, did you, among other things, notice a little foreign-looking chest or trunk?"

"Yes, I noticed it particularly, on account of its peculiar appearance."

"Did you notice its contents?"

"I merely opened it—the key was in the lock—to see

that it was in proper order to put away. I took possession of the key, as I did of all of them, and have them in my trunk at this moment; and," she added, with a smile, "I am very, very happy to have found their owner."

"You found in that chest packages of letters, old account-books, and bundles of papers?" Alice asked, not seeming to heed her last remark.

"Yes, I noticed that it contained old books and papers—I did not examine them—I did not like to do anything," she said, with heightened color, "which savored of curiosity. The position in which I found myself was, to say the least, peculiar, and I felt that I, a stranger, had no right to pry into family matters, which, perhaps, it were better for both Amy and myself that I should know nothing about."

"You were very considerate, Miss Melfert," Alice said, with a grateful glance; then added, sadly, "you *would* have learned something of my history had you done so, and it could have done no real harm; still there are some things in our lives which we would prefer to keep locked within our own hearts. But what I was thinking of particularly was this: That chest belonged to an uncle of mine who came from Australia a few years ago. It has a false bottom which contains documents of great value to me, for they represent quite a handsome fortune which is invested in different ways. It is doubtful if you would have discovered this, even if you had examined the contents, but if you had only known of it, there would have been no need of your toiling for bread for either yourself or my child. But I am glad to know the box is safe," she concluded, with a sigh of satisfaction.

"I knew, of course," Pearle returned, "that there must be ample means somewhere—your style of living

proved that—but, madam, your mother was too ill to give me any information regarding such matters; the servants knew nothing, and so there remained only two things for me to do when all was over—either to send Amy to some charitable institution or take charge of her myself. The first I could not do; the second I was glad to do.”

“Ah! if you had sent her away to *such* a place, I should never have seen my child again,” the young mother exclaimed, drawing Amy to her with a passionate gesture. “*Mon Dieu*,” she added, with a sob, “what a life mine has been!”

Pearle looked at her, a great pity shining in her eyes. She saw that some mystery shrouded her life, but of what nature she could not even guess. She was drawn to her more and more; she was gentle, refined, and well educated; she must have been very beautiful when in the bloom of health, for she was lovely now, though pale and wan from illness, and there was an unmistakable air of gentle breeding and good blood about her.

She had not referred, in the remotest manner, to her husband, and once when Mrs. Murdock, while caressing Amy, asked if she resembled her father, her lips grew white and stern, her gentle eyes almost fierce in their expression, as she answered, briefly, “no,” and then instantly changed the subject.

They saw that it was very painful to her, and they never referred to it again.

Dr. Murdock, although still delicately attentive to her every want and need, had changed very perceptibly in his manner toward her since the restoration of her reason.

Before he had been tender and affectionate, treating her more like a beloved and petted child, or younger sister, than anything else.

Now, when in her presence, he assumed a deference and courtesy, such as he would have bestowed upon any patient who was a stranger to him ; while his fine face had suddenly grown grave and thoughtful, and almost gloomy in expression.

His mother noticed all this and wondered at it ; her own manner remained unchanged—indeed she seemed to love their beautiful charge, and to watch over her even more tenderly than before.

“I suppose we shall not be able to keep May—Alice—I hardly know what to call her—with us much longer,” she said, the same day that the above conversation with Pearle occurred.

“I’m afraid not,” he answered, briefly, and turning his face from the light ; then, with a quickly-drawn breath, he asked : “Has she spoken of any plans?”

“No ; but Miss Melfert says she is wealthy—that she has quite a fortune.”

“Yes,” he said, with something of sharpness in his tone.

“I am sorry, George. I have grown to love her very dearly, and I would be glad to have her with us always,” Mrs. Murdock continued, with gentle plaintiveness.

George Murdock made no reply to this, but sat resting his head on his hand in gloomy silence.

“Of course,” his mother continued, “I do not mean that I am sorry that she has recovered the use of her mental faculties ; but I wish she hadn’t so much money. I shall be very lonely if she goes away from us. I wish we could persuade her to stay, and I should really love to have the little one chattering about.”

Still no answer from her companion ; he sat like a statue, so ominously still, that she glanced at him with something

of surprise, not unmixed with anxiety. But her mind was full of their charge, and she went on :

"There is something rather strange about her past life, don't you think so, George? I wonder what kind of a husband she had—if he is dead, or if not, what has become of him."

George Murdock bounded from his chair with a suddenness that startled her.

"Mother, I am going out ; I have an errand in the city," he said, in a strained, unnatural voice.

He walked half way across the room, stopped suddenly, then turning, came and stood behind his mother's chair.

"Mother," he began, and startled by his tone she looked up at him, and saw that he was deathly pale. She was upon the point of remarking upon it, but something restrained her. "Mother," he repeated, "I think with you, that there is some mystery connected with May's—Alice's life, but on no account would it be best to seek to ascertain the nature of it."

"Certainly not, my son."

"If—if she chooses to confide in us, well and good ; if not, we will respect her silence, and—and care for her just as tenderly as we have always done, as long as she will stay with us. I know that she intends to make a home for herself somewhere—I heard her tell Miss Melfert so—and when it comes to that, *if it must*, we will help her to find a pleasant one."

His hand rested on the back of her chair, and she felt him tremble with the mighty effort that he made to speak calmly, while she saw the great drops of sweat shining on his forehead.

"*You* will miss her as well as I," she said, sadly.

"Mother, *don't!*" he cried, sharply, and growing white about the mouth.

"George!"

Her eyes were opened at last, and she scanned his face with sorrowful surprise.

Without a word he turned and walked abruptly from the room.

"Poor boy! I never dreamed that he would learn to care for her like that—she was like a little child in her helplessness," Mrs. Murdock said, weeping over the discovery she had made.

CHAPTER XLII.

"FIRE! HELP!"

Pearle remained with Alice and Amy until late in the evening of the day spoken of in the last chapter; indeed she had spent most of the time in their rooms since her interview with Adison Cheetham, for she stood in continual dread of meeting him again, as Dr. Murdock told her he was still at the hotel, and haunted the halls and public rooms constantly. She had had an interview with Lady Fennel-sea, and that worthy and high-minded dame had settled with her, when she had also undertaken to give her good advice.

Miss Camilla took no pains to conceal the malicious joy she experienced upon learning that Pearle was to be dismissed, and kept throwing out spiteful hints and insinuations throughout the interview.

Pearle paid not the slightest attention to the ill-man-

nered girl, which only served to irritate her a hundred fold ; but when Lady Fennelsea remarked in her condescendingly patronizing way, that she trusted Mrs. Cheetham would now realize the necessity of redeeming her character, and yield the obedience that it was proper that a *respectable* wife *should* yield her husband, the outraged girl could contain herself no longer.

"Lady Fennelsea," she said, with proud dignity, "I would not forget for a moment that I am a *lady*, notwithstanding your slurs and innuendoes, but I cannot refrain from telling you that your vulgar patronage is disgusting, and I believe you will yet live to realize and regret it," with which parting shot she bowed herself from her ladyship's august presence, leaving both mother and daughter speechless from astonishment for the first time in their lives.

But to return to the time that Pearle bade her new friends "good-night," and retired to her own room.

The next day she was to have an apartment adjoining theirs, as some of the guests were to leave then ; so she spent an hour or two packing her trunks, to save time on the morrow, for every moment that she could spare with Amy seemed too precious to be lost.

Since discovering how she had been "imposed upon," Lady Fennelsea had made a change in her domestic arrangements. It would not do to allow Fred and Clara, in their tender years, to remain longer under her disgraced governess' contaminating influence ; consequently they had been removed to the room hitherto occupied by Miss Camilla and Francita, while those young ladies, much to their disgust, were obliged to mount another flight of stairs to occupy their apartment, the door between which and Pearle's room was now kept securely locked.

But all this was only adding one more link to the chain that was, ere long, to strangle forever their disgusting and ostentatious pride of birth and position.

Pearle's task of packing completed, she retired, and soon fell into a quiet and peaceful sleep. No weight of care rested upon her now, her heart was freed from its chief burden, since she had determined to shake off, once for all, the galling shackles that bound her, while she felt safe and content in the protection of Dr. Murdock until her brother could arrive.

In another portion of that great building there was, on this night, a restless, impatient watcher.

Adison Cheetham, with no desire to sleep, paced back and forth in his room, plotting and puzzling his brain over the knotty problem of how he was to accomplish what he had sworn he would do. Every now and then an oath would leap to his lips, that he should be so balked by a woman, and that, just when victory seemed so near, some one always interfered, or something occurred to frustrate his designs.

He had not seen Pearle once since that afternoon when they were interrupted by Dr. Murdock, though he had, as the young physician had told her, haunted all the halls and public rooms, determined to waylay her if he could get but a glimpse of her; and now he was trying to plan some way to outwit both her and her protectors, and if she would not go with him peaceably he would lure her away by strategy.

Hundreds of men, women, and children lay around him asleep; he alone of them all refusing to yield to the influence of the drowsy god, and all alike unconscious of the fell demon so secretly at work around them, and creep-

ing so stealthily inch by inch upon them, like some ambushed enemy bent upon their destruction.

A clock somewhere near him struck one. He took out his watch to see if his time agreed with it; it was five minutes of one, and with a moody brow and a sigh of discontent he began to think it was time for him to be in bed also.

Suddenly a cry rent the air somewhere in the distance. It seemed far away and indistinct.

He bent his head to listen, his cheeks blanching, his heart beating with great, fierce throbs. Again he heard it.

"Fire! help!"

It was a blood-curdling sound; there was another moment of utter silence, and then wild cries, shrieks, and groans rose upon the still night air like the roar and tumult of a sudden storm.

Adison Cheetham sprang to the door, unlocked and threw it open, and then bounded down the stairs two steps at a time.

It had not been two minutes since that first indistinct cry reached his ears; but the whole building seemed to be alive with the humanity that so lately had been peaceably asleep. Crowds were rushing aimlessly hither and thither, shouting, shrieking, and begging for mercy and help. A perfect panic seemed to have seized the multitude, and they poured forth from that mammoth building as if they had been expelled by some mechanical agency within.

"Where is the fire?" demanded Adison Cheetham of a porter.

"In the north wing, second floor," was the reply, as the man hurried on with his buckets toward the scene of the destruction.

"*Her* room is in the north wing, third floor," Adison Cheetham muttered, with white lips.

He knew well enough just where her room was, for he had not rested until he had ascertained that fact.

He bounded on after the porter, and found that the fire was working dire mischief in the second story of the building.

Brave men were valiantly rescuing helpless women and children from their danger, and every one from the second floor was safely conducted from the building and out of harm's way in fifteen minutes from the time the first alarm was given.

But the less unfortunate inhabitants of the third floor seemed to be cut off from every avenue of escape. The fire had broken out near the middle of the corridor, just where the stairs led into the upper story, and the flames went creeping up through the frame-work; the smoke, dense and suffocating, ascended until it appeared as if there could be no help for those above.

The confusion was appalling. The fire was being subdued in the second story, but no one could ascend to the third, and no one could escape from there through that line of flame and smoke upon the stairs. It was dreadful; and brave men felt their hearts quake with terror, their strength and courage forsake them, as they listened to the helpless appeals of those from above for them to come and save them.

At last there was a joyful cry from without.

A ladder had been raised from the roof of the low building, or passage, which connected the main structure with the north wing, and all the unfortunate captives in the rooms upon that side of the corridor were soon rescued from their danger.

But those upon the other side were still in imminent peril, for the corridor was now full of flame and smoke, against which every door had been shut and locked as soon as it had been ascertained that escape in that direction was impossible.

Pearle's room was one of these, as was also that of the Misses Fennelsea.

Adison Cheetham, on reaching the north wing, had rushed frantically up the second floor, with the determination to run the fiery gantlet beyond at all hazards.

"If I can save her life, she will *owe* it to me, and then I shall win; she cannot, she dare not, defy me then," he cried, as he dashed recklessly onward.

But he was driven back—he could not breathe; no one could live a moment in that dense atmosphere.

With a cry of despair he turned and rushed down the stairs again, as if his feet had been shod with wings; he sped out upon the veranda, along the length of it, bounded over the railing, and eagerly scanned the panic-stricken faces looking forth from the windows of that fated upper story.

He searched in vain, for not a familiar face did he see, and grew almost frantic with the sickening suspense.

"Save my daughter! save my children!" shrieked some one, clutching him frantically by the arm.

He turned and looked to see who it was. It was Lady Fennelsea. A ray of hope shot through his heart.

"Which room are they in?" he demanded.

"That one—oh, there! be quick! the flames are beginning to burst through the roof—oh, heavens! in a few moments it will be too late; save them—save them! and you shall have any price," and the distracted woman sank, weeping and exhausted, upon the ground.

Men were now seen the on roof, with long, stout ropes in their hands.

These they let down to the windows, and the inmates of those rooms tied them around their waists and were lifted up in safety to the top of the burning building, and then carefully let down upon the other side by the ladder, where others received them and bore them away in safety.

But this took time, and all the while the fire was spreading rapidly; all but two rooms had been emptied of their occupants, and here the roof was so hot that the men could not remain upon it a moment.

These rooms were the ones occupied by Pearle and the Misses Fennelsea, and at one of the windows there could now be seen three white, terrified faces looking down upon the anxious crowd below.

"They are lost—they must die!" was whispered, with horror, from mouth to mouth.

"Give me a ladder," cried a hoarse, stern voice from the crowd.

"The ladders are all in use," some one answered.

"A ladder! a ladder! by Heaven! I will have a ladder," and a man darted frantically out of sight.

In less than three minutes he was back, panting and excited, but with a long, strong ladder across his broad shoulders.

Eager hands were ready to place it for him, while he wet a handkerchief and tied it over his mouth and nostrils; then, with a command to the men to "hold it firm and steady," he sprang up the rounds with the agility of a cat.

While he is ascending, we will see how it has fared with our gentle heroine.

We have said that sleep, quiet and peaceful, came to

her; pleasant dreams also—dreams of home and friends, and of the bright, beautiful days when she was so happy and care-free at Ashton Manor.

Nothing of the confusion occasioned by the fire reached her, until Miss Camilla and Francita rushed, terror-stricken, into her room, calling wildly upon her to save them.

They had been awakened by the cries and confusion below, had rushed into the corridor, thinking to escape thus, but were driven back by the flames and smoke, and were only too glad to seek refuge in their own room again. Then they had unfastened the door leading into Pearle's room, to seek company in their misery.

"What is the trouble?" she asked, much startled; while, springing from her bed, she began to put on her clothing.

"We are all afire—the hall is in flames, and there is no way for us to escape," exclaimed Francita, who was the calmer of the two sisters; Camilla having sunk down at Pearle's feet, clinging to her in abject terror, and shrieking with fright.

"Be quiet, Miss Fennelsea," Pearle said, authoritatively; "we shall be saved, do not fear," though as she said it she grew sick at heart as she heard the sharp crackling of the flames outside the door, and saw the puffs of smoke that came in through the keyhole and over the transom.

Then she went to the window and looked out, but all that she could see was a sea of agonized faces, and people running wildly about.

A feeling of despair took possession of her. The room was growing hot and stifling; a few moments more and she knew the flames would burst within. Even if help was sent to them, she began to think it very doubtful if they *all* could be saved.

"One of us at least must perish, I fear," she thought, as she counted the chances.

She had been trembling, and her teeth chattering with excitement; but now, as this terrible thought forced itself upon her, she grew suddenly calm and collected. For one moment she bowed her head in prayer.

"God help us!" she breathed. "Save these two who have home, and happiness, and friends to love them; and for thy servant---*Thy will be done!*"

The next moment she turned her attention to the distracted girls clinging to her.

She put them forcibly from her, darted into their room and brought their clothing, bidding them dress themselves, while she assisted them with nimble but steady fingers, never once making a false movement. Never in their lives had they been more helpless, but never before had they been more quickly clad.

Pearle, on glancing from the window, now saw that a ladder had been placed underneath, and this gave her a faint hope; but just at that moment the transom cracked, the glass tumbled to the floor with a jingling crash, and the flames and smoke poured into the room in volumes.

Camilla uttered a piercing shriek, and wound her arms about Pearle's form so that she could not move.

"Oh, save me!" she moaned. "I cannot die—I am not fit to die!"

"Be still!" Pearle said, sternly, as she wrenched her clinging hands apart. "If God wills that you shall be saved, so it will be; if not, do not spend the little time that remains in useless wailing."

She gathered together their watches and jewels, and put them into their pockets. Her own watch, two or three costly rings, ear jewels, and brooch, which she had for-

gotten to remove when she fled so hastily from Ashton Manor, she put into a little box and then gave it to Francita, who had been silently and wonderingly watching the strangely self-possessed girl as she moved so quietly and swiftly about the rooms.

"If you are saved, and—I am not, will you see that this little box is sent to the Earl of Radcliffe, of Ashton Manor, Leicester, Leicestershire County, with my love; and—and"—the pale, beautiful lips quivered slightly—"tell him not to mourn for me, for earth's pain will all be over for me."

The girl gazed at her stupidly.

"Do you understand me?" Pearle asked, giving her a little shake.

"Yes; I understand. Did you say the Earl of Radcliffe?" she asked, astonishment getting the better of her fright for the moment.

"Yes; he is my brother."

"*Your brother!*" she repeated, so blankly that Pearle smiled slightly, in spite of her consciousness of their desperate situation.

"Yes; I will tell you now, dear," she said, gently. "I am Margaret Radcliffe, and I was obliged to go away from my home on account of trouble for which I was in no way to blame."

"And they—mamma and Camilla—have treated you like a slave! Camilla, do you hear? This is Miss Margaret Radcliffe, of Ashton Manor," and she shook her sister roughly to make her understand.

"Never mind," Pearle interposed, and drawing her toward the window, as she saw that help was near; "we have no time to lose. God bless you, my dear girl; you have been very kind to me."

She kissed her tenderly, and began to help her out of the window.

"I must go first; I am the oldest; I must be saved first!" shrieked Camilla, as she saw the act; and springing from the floor, she rushed frantically to the window and began to struggle to get out.

"No," Pearle answered, firmly, and she dragged her back by main strength. "Francita is the heavier, and whoever comes to our rescue must take the greatest burden first."

"Come—I have come to save *you*," said a voice at the window, and reaching out his arms to Pearle.

"No; take her," she answered, pointing to Francita. "I shall not go until they are both safe;" and her firm, undaunted look plainly told that she would not yield.

With a smothered oath, the man seized Francita, helped her out upon the ladder, and conducted her down the dizzy height in safety to the ground.

She did nobly, silently and quickly obeying his every command, intent on getting down as soon as possible in order that the others might be saved.

Then the brave man sprang nimbly back over the steep pathway again.

The smoke was pouring out of the window now, the flames were forcing their way into and all about the room, clutching everything within their reach, hurrying in a mad gallop toward those two girls at the window—one so grandly calm, the other so object in her fear.

"Come," said the man again, as he reached them, and he laid his hand firmly on Pearle's arm this time.

"No," she answered, steadily; "I will not go until she is safe," and she forced Camilla toward his outstretched hand.

Had she recognized him she might have shrunk from going with him under any circumstances; but his hair was disheveled under his slouched hat, his face blackened by smoke and cinders, and with the handkerchief tied over his mouth and nostrils, he was as effectually disguised as if he had worn a mask.

"I will not take her," he cried; "you or no one," and his hold tightened upon her arm.

"Do not, as you value human life, waste one single moment. *I will not* leave this room until I see her safe upon the ground;" and, with a strength that was almost superhuman, she tore herself from his grasp, and almost lifted her now fainting companion over the window-sill.

A look of despair leaped into his eyes, then he grasped his unconscious burden, and went slowly and laboriously down the swaying ladder.

Pearle was now the only inmate of that burning building; every one else had been rescued, and no one now had any hope that she could be saved.

The room was enveloped in flames, all but a little circle where she stood; nearer and nearer they came, rolling out their forked tongues, as if hungry and eager for their prey. The hot, red smoke, itself almost a flame, and the cinders poured over and around her, as they rushed from the window. She stood leaning far out, brave and calm, never faltering, though she knew there was but very little hope, if any, that she could be saved; and there was no trace of fear on her marble face, no look of weakness in her solemn eyes.

She was nearly suffocating with the dense atmosphere; she was panting and gasping for breath.

Her wash-basin and pitcher were near where she stood. She reached out her hand and dipped her handkerchief

into the water, but her delicate hand was scorched, and blistered, and blackened when she drew it out.

She bound the wet linen about her face and leaned still farther from that fiery furnace, seeking for air—air. Oh! if she could but breathe a little longer.

Alas! her brave rescuer had not yet reached the ground with his other burden.

A hush like that of death had fallen upon the multitude without, as, with staring eyes and horror-stricken faces, they watched that slight form above.

Still on and on the fire-demons danced. They had reached her very feet now, her garments were singed and smoking, and again her hand was badly burned as she reached down to smother the flame that had caught her skirts.

She knew she could not live five minutes longer in that heated, strangling air; already she was gasping for breath, the handkerchief about her face was steaming and drying, and she dare not reach to wet it again.

Again she bent far out of the window and looked down; the flame from the window beneath had scorched and blackened the ladder, in a minute more it would ignite. A thought came to her.

Dare she step out upon that frail support and begin that perilous descent by herself? The height made her dizzy and faint; she might fall and be dashed in pieces; but she must make the attempt or die where she was. There was not an instant to be lost, or she would be hopelessly enveloped in a sheet of flame. Already her feet and ankles, her hands and arms, were badly burned, and the pain nearly drove her wild.

One earnest, despairing cry she raised to Heaven, then gathering her smoking skirts around her, she crept outside

the window, and swinging slowly, carefully around, touched her feet upon the first round of the ladder.

A mighty sigh swelled up from the multitude as they saw the daring act of the brave girl; then it was instantly hushed by a great fear.

The man with his burden just at that moment stepped to the ground, and the sound of that sigh made him turn and look back.

"Oh, God!" he cried. "Water—give me water!"

A bucketful was held before him. He deluged his face, and then turned once more to battle for human life.

Every breath was again hushed, every heavy heart-beat was almost held in check as the throng watched that slender, swaying form slowly descending, and that other springing so wildly to meet it.

They could see that her strength was waning; that every time a little foot was put down upon a round its touch was less decided and secure, and a terrible fear began to take possession of each heart that the hero would be too late.

No! no! On he went, nerved to greater exertions by what he himself saw and realized. A step more and he was beside her; but not a moment too soon, for her strength failed, her nerveless hands relaxed, just as he put out his arms to receive her.

Uttering a wild, hoarse cry, he gathered her close to him with one arm, while with the other he steadied his descending steps.

A new danger menaced them now—an angry flame had seized upon the ladder. The little demon had been hiding, and smoldering, and watching, as it were, in that charred and smoking spot that Pearle had seen from the window above, and now burst into a lively flame, fiercely darting out its fiery tongues, stretching up and wreathing around

the slender support, as if maddened by the sight of the escaping captive.

Would it bear the double weight as the two passed over it? Faces blanched, lips quivered, knees trembled; but the danger was safely passed.

But hark! a snap! a crack! the ladder settled a trifle, and every heart stood still.

For an instant that resolute man hesitated, and his body seemed to sway dizzily; the next, he seemed to have gathered up his failing forces; steadily and surely every step was taken, until at last his foot touched the solid ground once more.

A wild, triumphant cheer burst from every grateful throat, eager arms were outstretched to take his unconscious burden, and then, with a deep-drawn sigh of weariness, the hero of the hour dropped exhausted to the earth.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"BLESSED TIDINGS."

The fire raged for half an hour longer before it could be got under subjection; then it steadily subsided, although the upper story of that portion of the building was almost wholly destroyed, and the second story very badly damaged. There had been a south wind all the time, that had blown the flames away from the other portions of the great hotel, and, under the ceaseless and judicious efforts of the brave firemen, who arrived from the city just about the time of Pearle's rescue, they were confined entirely to the north wing.

Two hours and a half from the time the fire was discovered it was quelled and all danger past.

Then, and not till then, the people who had been driven in such fright from their rooms began to count up their injuries and losses.

There were burns, bruises, sprains, and scratches; but not a life was lost; and when the brave proprietor, who had worked as if he had possessed the strength of a dozen men, and a charmed life as well, was assured of this, his nervous face forsook him; he sank down exhausted, and actually broke into grateful sobbing.

Much that was valuable in the way of clothing, jewelry, and so forth, had been destroyed; but nearly every one made light of this fact, in their gratitude for their escape from a dreadful death.

Two strangers had reached the spot just about the time the firemen had come to the rescue, and just as Pearle had been borne to the ground in safety.

One of these had rushed forward, with almost frantic gestures, upon learning who it was that had been in such fearful danger, and it was his arms that were outstretched to receive her, and she was borne quickly from the scene of confusion.

"Come this way," said a man, touching him upon the shoulder.

It was Dr. Murdock, and he led the way to the opposite wing, where his own rooms were situated.

Together they bore the unconscious girl up stairs, and laid her upon the physician's own bed.

Mrs. Murdock, with tender solicitude, assisted in removing her charred and blackened clothing, and the stranger uttered a cry of pain as he saw the great blisters upon one delicate hand and arm.

Both feet and ankles were also burned, the right one quite badly, so that the skin adhered to the stocking as it was removed.

"A physician! where can I find a physician?" cried the stranger, shuddering at the shocking sight, and starting wildly toward the door.

"I am a physician; I know Miss Melfert. Be calm, my friend, and I will do all that can be done for her," returned Dr. Murdock, who was making a careful examination of Pearle's condition.

"Is she dead? will she die? did the smoke suffocate her?" were the next incoherent queries which beset him.

But it was something far worse than the effects of the smoke that the doctor feared, as his next words betrayed.

"No, she is not dead; and *if* she has not inhaled the flames I trust no serious harm has come to her," and he proceeded to apply restoratives; while Mrs. Murdock, under his directions, bound up the burns upon her feet and hands.

"*If!* Oh, God! if I should lose her after all!" cried Richard Byrnholm—for it was he—as he bent over her still unconscious form in agony.

Dr. Murdock glanced at him in surprise.

"Are you her brother?" he asked.

"No—no; ha! she moves! she is beginning to breathe! *will* she live?" and, overcome by the agony of suspense, he threw himself upon his knees by the bedside, where he could watch every motion and every breath.

"You will be obliged to be very calm, or I shall not consider it very proper for you to remain here," George Murdock said, with some sternness, while at the same time he searched Richard's pale, handsome face keenly; he be-

gan to think it singular that a stranger should show so much emotion ; besides his words were unaccountable.

A moan of pain now drew his attention to the bed, and Pearle's white lids slowly unclosed, only to reveal the look of agony that told something of what she was suffering from her injuries ; and then unconsciousness mercifully sealed her senses again.

"I do not think she is seriously injured aside from the burns upon her limbs," he said, with a sigh of relief. "She breathed all right, and I know she is not hurt otherwise, for I saw her borne down the ladder as carefully as it was possible. Her burns are quite deep, and will be very painful for a while, but two or three weeks will make them all right."

Richard buried his head in the bed-clothes with a smothered exclamation of thankfulness at the cheering account. Then rising, he turned with something of calmness to the physician, saying :

"Is there anything that I can do? Do you need remedies from the city? Command me in any way, and I will gladly execute your behests."

"There is nothing that you can do, and I have all the remedies that I need. But, pardon me, do you know this young lady? Are you a friend?" George Murdock asked, with a grave, questioning look.

He knew he was not the man whom he had seen in the reception parlor with Pearle. He said he was not her brother. Who then could he be to evince so much emotion and solicitude, and would his presence then be agreeable to his patient when she should recover from her swoon? were thoughts that were rather perplexing to the young man.

"Do I know her?" Richard repeated, with trembling

lips, his whole soul in his eyes, as they rested upon the white face on the pillow. "Am I a friend? I am the dearest friend she has in all the world."

"But—but—Miss Melfert has told me that—that——" began the doctor, looking extremely confused at this strange announcement.

"You cannot comprehend the propriety of my claim, since, as I perceive, she has confided to you that some one has a superior one upon her," Richard interrupted, with a smile, and laying his hand confidentially upon George Murdock's shoulder. "But, my friend," he added, "this dear girl is more to me than my own life, and there are mysteries connected with her past and mine which I will gladly explain to you when she is sufficiently recovered for you to leave her."

The doctor was satisfied. There was no mistaking the look of truth and the honesty of purpose in the frank, manly face looking into his. His brow cleared, and he turned to Pearle, who was beginning to show signs of consciousness once more.

"If it is as you say, sit there, where her eyes can rest upon you. Her system has sustained a severe shock, and if there is any way to prevent a relapse of these faintings, we must improve it," and he pointed to a chair close beside the sufferer.

Richard obeyed, and waited in silence, and with what patience he could summon to his aid, for those dear eyes to unclose once more.

He had not long to wait, for the restoratives were doing their work, and the terrible pain from her burns was asserting itself.

She stirred restlessly, moaned, and then looked up helplessly and appealingly into the face bending so anxiously

over her. A startled look came into her eyes for an instant, then a glad smile irradiated her face in spite of her great suffering.

"Richard!" she whispered.

"Yes, my darling, I have come to take you home."

"Was it you that saved me?" she asked, with a shudder.

"No, dear, I do not know who the brave man was; but I shall bless him for the deed as long as I live," he murmured, gratefully, and with his trembling hand he smoothed her tangled hair back from her brow.

Neither of them dreamed of the test to which their gratitude would be put when they should discover *who* had risked his life to save hers.

Dr. Murdock now gave her something to drink, and wet her bandaged limbs with some cooling lotion.

"I fear I am badly burned," she said, shivering from the pain, which, as she came more to herself, began to be intolerable.

"Yes, you are, my dear young lady," he said, pitifully, "and the next few hours will require all your fortitude; but we will do the very best we can for your relief."

But the brave girl who had stood unflinchingly in that window, with those flames almost enveloping her, and had calmly faced death, was not one to weakly give up to physical suffering. The pain was well-nigh unbearable for the next six hours, but though her small hands were clenched with agony, and her usually fair, smooth brow contracted, her great gray eyes almost wild in their expression, yet no murmur escaped her lips, no look or gesture of impatience was apparent in her manner.

Above and over all her suffering was the consciousness that Richard, her beloved, was there; she knew not why nor wherefore, but it was nevertheless a great comfort.

Through all those long hours of pain he never left his post beside her; his tender hands ministered to her; his pitiful eyes looked the sympathy which his great heart experienced, and told her that he would gladly have borne it all for her had it been possible for him to do so.

The intense agony was over at last, and, weak and exhausted, Pearle dropped into a profound slumber.

Richard then stole quietly from the chamber, to see if he could contribute in any way to the comfort of others who might be suffering in the same way; but Pearle appeared to be the only one who was injured to any extent, and every one was anxious for the brave girl who had so heroically faced death for the sake of others.

It will be remembered that Richard Byrnholm and Sir Harold Cheswick left London immediately after learning from Lord Fennelsea that Pearle was governess in his mother's family.

They reached Vannes on a late train on the night of the fire, and being "hungry as a pair of wolves," as Sir Harold expressed it, they had ordered a hearty supper, which it of course took some time to prepare.

They had scarcely finished their repast when the alarm of fire was given, and great was the consternation upon learning that the great hotel and water-cure in the suburbs of the city was in flames.

With much of anxiety and fear in their hearts, they hastened with all speed to the place, where they arrived just as Adison Cheetham—for he was the hero who had so gallantly saved their lives—was descending the ladder with his last burden.

Almost the first person that Sir Harold had encountered was Lady Fennelsea, who was rejoicing and weeping over her daughters, who had just been restored to her.

"Are there any more in the building?" Sir Harold asked.

"No; she is the last one," she said, pointing to the unconscious form being borne down the ladder.

"Who is she?" he demanded, with a sinking heart, for his keen eye had been roving around to discover Pearle.

"The young lady who was my governess, Miss Melfert," she said, bursting into another fit of weeping.

Richard Byrnholm waited to hear no more, but darted frantically forward, and thrusting aside every eager, outstretched hand, seized his darling in his arms, and bore her away, without a word of explanation as to his right to do so.

Now that all danger was past, and no one needed his services, his thoughts naturally turned to the brave man to whom he felt that he owed so much. He sought Sir Harold to ascertain if he had discovered who he was; but he had not, although he had made inquiries to that effect. Even Lady Fennelsea could not tell who had saved her daughters, and no one appeared to have paid any attention to him, or knew anything about him beyond the fact that he had accomplished a heroic act. He had appeared to revive after a few moments, and though apparently much exhausted, had hobbled away from the crowd and disappeared; and so, for the time, Richard was obliged to reserve the expressions of his gratitude.

The excitement had now in a great measure subsided, and comparative order had been restored after the confusion. Everybody was very kind and accommodating; people who had suites of rooms shared them with the unfortunate ones who had been so ruthlessly deprived of theirs, and did everything in their power to render the sufferers comfortable.

Lady Fennelsea and her children were provided with comfortable rooms, and she hovered tenderly around her daughters, who, although uninjured, were the same as restored from the dead to her.

She, with the two younger children, had been among the first to escape from the burning building, and she had been a terribly interested witness of all that had transpired at Pearle's window. She had been the first to discover those three white, scared faces looking forth from it; she had seen Pearle clasp Camilla in her arms and insist that Francita should go first when that brave man had gone to their rescue. This act nearly drove her frantic. Her warped nature could not comprehend the grand thoughts that had actuated her, and the thoughtfulness that had planned so wisely—in her terror and suspense she had thought that Pearle now intended to be revenged upon her eldest daughter for all the abuse and insult that she had received at her hands.

She scarce noticed Francita when she reached the ground in safety; her whole heart and mind were concentrated upon what should happen next. She moaned and wrung her hands constantly.

"She will perish—she will perish!" she cried, helplessly, as she saw the man reach the window, and lay his hand upon Pearle's arm, bidding her "come." Then she saw the brave girl raise her own unconscious daughter in her arms, and force her into those outstretched hands, while she drew back and firmly motioned that she would not go until his burden was safe; and when the grateful mother received her daughter unharmed, she was fairly dazed with wonder at an act so entirely above and beyond her comprehension; she could not understand that divine love, that

heroism, that could make any one thus sacrifice her life for an enemy.

After all was over, and Camilla restored to consciousness, she learned all that had transpired from Francita, who could not say enough to express her gratitude and admiration for Miss Melfert.

"If *she* had left *us* there," she said, with a white face and solemn eyes, "we must have been burned to death, for we were both so crazed with fright, that we were perfectly helpless. Why, mamma, she actually dressed us as if we had been children, and when that man told her that he had come to save her, she told him that she should not move from the place until we were both safe. If she had perished, mamma, I should never have known another happy moment," the girl concluded, weeping almost hysterically at the remembrance.

Lady Fennelsea was very repentant and remorseful.

"I have treated her shamefully. I have wronged her deeply. I wonder if she can ever forgive me!" she said, sobbing, and completely unnerved, and for the first time in her life her pride was utterly humbled.

Later in the day she went to Dr. Murdock, and begged to see his patient; but he told her that Pearle was sleeping, and would be able to see no one save her own friends for several days.

Then she found Sir Harold, and relieved her burdened heart to him, confessing her injustice to the beautiful girl, and telling him all that had occurred since they came to Vannes.

In this way Richard learned all that had befallen his loved one, and discovered also that, even as he feared, Adison Cheetham had followed her there, and was doubtless even then an inmate of the hotel.

"We did not arrive a moment too soon," he said to Sir Harold, when he told him what he had learned from Lady Fennelsea, "and I fear if I meet him I shall not be accountable for what may happen to him."

"Do not be rash, my boy," Sir Harold answered, "remember who alone has a right to mete out justice and vengeance. No harm has come to our friend, and of course we shall take everything into our own hands now. I think on the whole that it is well we all meet here. All matters can be settled at once, and we shall return with no fear of any further disturbance or trouble."

CHAPTER XLIV.

FACE TO FACE.

Several days went by, and many of those who had been deprived of their rooms by the fire returned to their homes, while others sought board in the cottages near by, and some went into the city to remain for the present.

Pearle was gaining rapidly.

Although she suffered much from the soreness of her burns, she was otherwise uninjured, and after a few days of rest and quiet she felt quite like herself again.

"I'm as good as new, except for being a little crippled," she said one day, with a very bright face, as Richard entered and inquired regarding her condition.

He had haunted the doctor's rooms ever since the fire, and would have waited upon Pearle constantly, but the young physician deemed it more prudent that his charge should only have his mother's care until he was fully

assured that she would experience no ill effects from the terrible ordeal through which she had passed. He allowed Captain Byrnholm to see her for a few moments every day, but would consent to no protracted conversation or explanations.

Pearle, on her part, often found herself wondering what had brought him there ; she knew it must be something in connection with herself, but of the nature of his mission she could form no idea, and was too languidly content and happy to have him there, in case of an emergency, to trouble herself about the matter.

She wondered, too, if Adison Cheetham was still there.

She asked Dr. Murdock a day or two after the fire, but he had not seen anything of him and could not tell her.

Pearle, however, did not fret or worry over it ; Richard had told her that Sir Harold Cheswick was there also, and with two such staunch protectors at hand she felt assured that no harm could come near her.

Alice Renau was improving wonderfully every day ; she was gaining both in flesh and strength, and a faint, beautiful color was taking the place of the deadly pallor which her face had always worn since her accident. Her eyes grew bright, her mind clearer and stronger ; and fond, lovely smiles came readily to her sweet lips as she listened to Amy's childish prattle.

She no longer occupied her invalid chair ; that was given up to Pearle now, while she sat by her side and talked over the past, eager to learn every event that had transpired. She had been greatly astonished upon being told that more than a year had elapsed since that dreadful day, but was forced to believe it when she saw how Amy had grown.

Her relations with George Murdock were strangely changed during this last week.

Of course, he was to her like a stranger; she had no knowledge or remembrance of him; while to him it seemed as if a mountain-like barrier had suddenly risen between him and the gentle, helpless girl whom he had watched and tended for so long.

Whenever she was in his presence his eyes would follow every movement of her graceful figure with a strangely fascinated, half-wondering gaze; and often he would start and heave a deep sigh when aroused to a sense of what he was doing.

Many times, on glancing up, Alice would find his dark eyes fixed upon her with such a sad, earnest, almost imploring look, that a vivid color would mount to her brow, and a feeling of embarrassment would impel her to make some excuse for leaving the room to escape it.

* * * * *

One bright morning—the fourth day after the fire—Richard tapped for admittance upon Pearle's door.

A sweet, well-known voice bade him enter, and, with a glad light in his handsome face, he obeyed.

With a quick, elastic tread he crossed the room to her side.

Pearle's heart always bounded at his coming, and yet a feeling of sadness, a sort of guilty reproachfulness, took possession of her heart while in his presence.

What right had the blood to leap more quickly in her veins at the sound of his footstep? why should the color fly to her cheek, and her eyes droop consciously before him? were questions which she sternly asked herself after every interview with him.

To-day there was something in his quick, light step that sent the blood tingling through all her frame, and as he

reached her chair the crimson in her cheeks told all too plainly how his presence moved her.

She could not look up—she felt guilty, condemned, and yet strangely happy, and, before she was aware of his intention, he had stooped, taken her glowing face between his hands, raised it so that he could look full into it, and then kissed her softly, almost reverently, upon her lips.

“Richard!” she cried, in a startled, almost distressed tone, while the color faded out of her face, leaving it white and full of pain.

“Pearle, forgive me,” he said, seeming to remember something, “but I could not help it; you looked so exactly like my Pearle of Ashton Manor.”

She made no reply, but her bright, brown head drooped still lower than before, a tremulous sigh welled up from her aching heart, her lips trembled painfully, and the tears stood upon her long lashes.

It seemed cruel when she loved him so—when she was weak and could not hide it, that he should come and probe her wound thus.

But Richard Byrnholm’s face was strangely luminous.

“Look up my peerless Pearle—do you think I would come to you and wound you thus if I did not bring you hope—joy? Dearest, look into my eyes, let me read in yours the light of the olden time, while I tell you some blessed tidings,” he said, as he knelt upon the footstool before her, and, taking both her hands, drew her tenderly toward him.

Her eyes were lifted now in startled surprise.

What tidings that could be “*blessed tidings*” could he possibly have for her?

He had once suggested the measure of having her marriage annulled. Could it be that he and her brother had

succeeded in having it made null and void, and he had come to seek her to tell her of it?

Could either of them believe that she would be willing to marry her old lover while Adison Cheetham lived?

How strangely they had mistaken her character if they thought so, and Richard had no right to assume his old manner toward her, until he had heard her decision regarding the matter.

But he looked so joyous, so handsome, so assured that his "blessed tidings" would bring her joy also.

"Darling," he went on, drawing her nearer, "do not look so troubled, so grave and serious; I must do something to banish that sad reproach from your eyes. Listen——"

But at that instant there came another knock upon the door.

With an expression of annoyance Richard arose and went to open it.

Sir Harold Cheswick stood upon the threshold.

"Do I intrude?" he asked, as he saw Richard.

"Not at all. Come in," he answered, a smile chasing the irritation from his brow; and yet he did wish he had waited a little longer—he so wanted to see Pearle smile one of her old joyous smiles again.

But he led him directly to the fair girl sitting by the window.

"Pearle," he said, "I bring you an old friend. Sir Harold Cheswick, allow me to introduce to you Miss Margaret Radcliffe, of Ashton Manor."

Pearle greeted her kind friend most cordially, although the tell-tale blood in her cheeks betrayed that she had not forgotten a little episode that had occurred during her sojourn in his home.

She wondered, too, that Richard should have introduced her by her maiden name; surely, it must be that they had succeeded in annulling her marriage?

But Sir Harold did not give her time to muse over the past. His manner was very friendly and perfectly free from all restraint, and he began chatting in the most cheerful manner.

"How are the burns?" he asked, after bantering Richard upon having turned nurse, and such a successful one, too, with a glance at her rosy cheeks.

"Pretty sore, thank you, but healing nicely, the doctor says," she answered, smiling, though her color deepened.

"I never thought to see you alive again; I feared you were suffocated, when I saw that man bringing you down that ladder," he said, gravely.

"I wonder who it was who braved so much for me," Pearle said, and looking thoughtfully out of the open window where she sat.

Almost instantly she drew back, uttering a terrified cry.

"What is it, Pearle?" Richard demanded, startled at the death-like paleness that was overspreading her face.

"Nothing, nothing," she said, hastily, and struggling to regain composure; then she turned to Sir Harold and began to ask him some questions regarding the amount of damages the fire had done.

Richard watched her uneasily.

That something had disturbed her greatly he could see, for she was trembling, although she strove to conceal it, while she kept glancing anxiously from the window.

The truth was this: On looking out of the window, which was opened to admit the pure air, for the day was warm, Pearle had espied Adison Cheetham directly under-

neath, and he, attracted by the sound of her voice, had raised his eyes at that moment and had seen her.

The sight affected her strangely, for she was still weak ; she did not fear him ; she knew that there were too many friends around her for him to do her any harm, but at the same time his presence excited her, although she tried to go on with her conversation with Sir Harold as if nothing had occurred.

"I hear, Miss Radcliffe," he said, appearing not to mind her emotion, "that during your exile you have adopted a witching little fairy. Is she here with you? I should like to see her."

"Certainly you shall see her ; but I fear I am about to lose her again," Pearle answered, sadly.

"Ah ! How so?"

"It is a long story, Sir Harold, and I have not yet been able to relate it, even to Captain Byrnholm. I was intending to do so to-day, and you shall both hear it after you have seen Amy."

She touched a bell that stood beside her on a table, and Mrs. Murdock immediately came into the room to see what her charge wanted.

Pearle introduced her to Sir Harold, and then asked to have Amy sent to her.

Ten minutes later the beautiful child came dancing into the room, her happy face wreathed in smiles, and her golden hair flying over her plump shoulders, while she was clad in the daintiest and whitest of garments.

She went directly to the baronet at Pearle's command, and laying her tiny hand in his, looked up into his face with grave, serious eyes for a moment. It was a way she had with every one who was a stranger to her.

The scrutiny seemed to be entirely satisfactory, for when

he lifted her upon his knee she settled herself contentedly in his lap, and began to play with the diamond-studded seal attached to his watch chain.

At this moment loud and excited voices were heard in the corridor, then the door of their room was thrown violently open, and Adison Cheetham strode boldly in, followed by Dr. Murdock, with a very red and angry face.

Pearle uttered a cry of dismay, while Amy, with a frightened look, jumped from her perch, flew to her side, and clung, trembling, to her neck.

Sir Harold and Richard Byrnholm both sprang to their feet and confronted the unceremonious visitor.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" demanded Richard, sternly.

"Intrusion, indeed!" was the mocking retort. "I should rather think it belonged to *me* to put that question to *you*," and he strode fiercely toward Richard, who was standing before Pearle as if to shield her.

"I have come for my wife," he continued, with a scowl at the shrinking girl. "I have been trying to discover what room she occupied ever since the fire, and only ascertained a few moments ago by seeing her at the window yonder."

Ah! that explained to Richard her emotion when she had looked out.

"Your wife?" he repeated, with peculiar emphasis, and with something like a warning in his tones.

"Yes, *my wife*! I claim her in defiance of everything. She is mine, and no power on earth shall wrest her from me now," he answered, savagely, and advancing a step or two toward where Pearle sat.

Sir Harold here interposed. He placed himself directly

in front of the desperate man, and looked him calmly in the eye.

"We will settle this matter once for all. Miss Radcliffe is *not* your wife; she has *never* been your wife, and you know it as well as I. Leave this room instantly, or I will cause you to be arrested for—*bigamy*."

"Bigamy!" gasped Pearle, white and trembling, and gazing from one to the other, a look of horror in her great eyes.

Richard turned, reached down, and clasped her well hand in his; while Sir Harold continued, with a glance of compassion into her colorless face:

"Yes; or at least, attempted bigamy. Thank Heaven that some kind angel prompted you to fly from him as you did, and that you have been protected from evil designs during all these months. But, my dear friend, let your heart be at rest from this moment, for this man had a wife living at the time he compelled you to go through with that mockery so long ago."

Pearle heard him as in a dream. Was it all a dream? Would she soon awake and find it but a vision?

No; that strong hand clasping hers, that tender face bending over her, were real; she knew that they were telling her only the truth. But the reaction—the great, wild throb of joy at her heart, was almost too much for her, and, for a moment, it seemed as if her senses were slipping away from her.

She was no wife—she had never been a wife; no obligations, either moral or civil, bound her to this man, against whom all her nature revolted. She was free—blessed thought!—free as she had ever been in her happy girlhood days, and all these weary months of toil and suffering had been for naught.

"For naught, have they?" she thought, catching her breath quickly. "No," she murmured, bowing her head reverently, her heart growing quiet with a solemn thankfulness; "not one day of my suffering has been for naught since it has led me to God."

"Pearle—*my* Pearle, now and forever," whispered Richard, in trembling tones. "These were the blessed tidings which I came to tell you; that is why we are both here. We discovered some time ago that this wretch had another wife, and we have been seeking you ever since."

A smothered sob of joy and relief was her only answer, but she clung to his hand in a way that thrilled him. It told him that she was his once more—that henceforth she would rest in the shelter of his love and care.

"It is false!" Adison Cheetham burst forth, passionately, in reply to Sir Harold's statements. "You have tried to frighten me once before with this same story, when you two came down to Pelham Pines and accused me of this crime, thinking, I suppose, that your proofs were indisputable because you had happened to come across a couple of names recorded in a church register. But, as you know, I was not so easily alarmed, and when you were gone, I laughed you to scorn, and vowed that I would checkmate you, after all."

Sir Harold Cheswick and Richard Byrnholm were indeed the visitors whom Adison Cheetham had been telegraphed home from Scotland to meet.

That record which they had discovered, seemingly by accident, in the little church at Bar le Duc, and which had so startled Sir Harold and so utterly unmanned Richard, was the record of a marriage between *Adison Cheetham and Alice Marie Renaul*!

It was there that the baronet obtained a clew to the man

who had so wronged the girl he was seeking, and Richard learned that there was a possibility—indeed, a probability—that Pearle was no wife; that she was as free as air, and might have been happy in his love during all these months.

The knowledge came like a thunderbolt to him, making him nearly insane for the time with grief and rage, and a wild, new-born hope, although his friend tried to curb his excitement, fearing that a second disappointment might prove fatal to him.

On talking the matter over more calmly on their way back to Paris, they decided to go at once and confront Adison Cheetham, and charge him with the crime of bigamy.

But after the first shock which their unexpected presence had given him, he became so cool and insolent, and was so defiant and indifferent to their charges, and by neither word nor look gave them the least light on the subject, that they began to fear they had deceived themselves—that there might be another Adison Cheetham who was the husband of Alice Renau; though how that could be when the cure had described him so exactly was more than they could account for; and, after a stormy interview on their part, they had left Pelham Pines somewhat discouraged, although Richard had another strong reason for hope, as will hereafter appear.

Their next plan was to find Pearle, tell her of their discovery, induce her to return to Ashton Manor, and cheer her with this new hope.

It has been related how they discovered where she was, and how they hastened after her, hoping to reach her before Adison Cheetham should find her.

They were somewhat dismayed upon learning that he

had reached the place two days before them, but much relieved to find that no harm had come to Pearle from his scheme, and now they were prepared to fight out the great final battle.

But it seems that the villain was as confident of his position and as defiant now as when they had visited him in his own home. But, at the same time, there was something in his manner, a restless, anxious gleam in his eye, that convinced Sir Harold that he was not quite so sure as he appeared.

"Cease!" he almost thundered. "You know that more than six—yes, nearly seven years ago, you won the love of a pure and lovely girl. You enticed her with false, smooth words to leave her home and go to a distant town, where you were married. I have already shown you a copy of the record of your marriage. I have it with me now, however, if you would like to see it again," and he drew the paper from his pocket and held it out for him to take.

"Bah! What do I care for that record?" he cried, scornfully. "It is true that, fascinated by her beauty, I recklessly married Alice Renau; but——"

"Alice Renau!—Amy!—oh, Richard!" Pearle cried, hoarsely, as this startling intelligence fell upon her ear. "This man Alice Renau's husband!—this man Amy's father!"

"Yes, dear, it is true, strange as it appears; but listen, and you shall know all," Richard whispered.

"But what?" Sir Harold demanded of Adison Cheetham, as he paused at Pearle's interruption and eyed her keenly. Neither he nor Richard had yet learned anything of either Amy or Alice beyond the fact that Pearle had adopted a child.

"But she died long before I became acquainted with Margaret Radcliffe," he answered, with a malicious leer at Richard.

"How do you know that she died? What proof have you of her death?" Sir Harold asked, somewhat eagerly.

A sinister smile curved the man's lips as, drawing forth that wallet that we have seen before, he took from it that slip of paper which he had read in his room at the Langham Hotel, and passed it to Sir Harold.

"Read that," he said; but his face had grown very white despite his assured manner.

The baronet took it, and read aloud:

"Died, at Chalons, April 20th, 18—, of small-pox, Alice Renau, aged 19."

A look of perplexity clouded the baronet's face for a moment; the next it cleared, and he said:

"There is a mistake about this; either some carelessness in writing the notice or a misprint has deceived you. It should read thus: 'Died, at Chalons, April 20th, 18—, of small-pox, Alec Renau, aged 79.' Monsieur Renau's brother Alec returned from Australia shortly after Mlle. Alice disappeared from her home with you. He brought a large fortune with him, and which—after she came back to her home, heart-broken at your treatment of her, and he was attacked with that terrible disease of which he knew he must die—he willed to her. I am connected with the family; I know that Monsieur Alec Renau died on the 20th of April, 18—, of small-pox, and was 79 years of age. Alec and Alice are so nearly alike that the mistake in the name is easily accounted for; while the upper part of the seven being obliterated, makes the age read 19."

"Do you think I am to be cheated by any such sophis-

try as this?" Adison Cheetham demanded, waxing angry. "Do you think I am such a fool that a cunningly devised tale like this is going to frighten me into yielding up my claim upon my wife yonder?" but his lips and his voice trembled as he said it.

"I have no wish to cheat you, as you express it," said Sir Harold, gravely. "As I said before, I am a connection of the family, and I have a fortune in my possession to be made over to this same Mlle. Renau, or Mrs. Cheetham, whenever I shall find her. I have visited her home, and have been told by an old servant, and by the cure, that it was her uncle who died, and that she, with her mother and child, left the place very suddenly several months afterward, and I feel as confident that she is alive to-day as that I myself am living."

Pearle here leaned forward as if to speak, but something in Adison Cheetham's appearance deterred her.

He was very white, and he trembled visibly as, leaning toward Sir Harold, he asked :

"What if I should tell you that I saw her after she was dead?"

"I should say that—I do not believe it," he answered, quietly.

"It is nevertheless true. The last time I looked upon her face she was *dead*."

His voice dropped to a whisper, and he shuddered as he said it.

"Impossible!" Sir Harold ejaculated, regarding him searchingly; while Richard grew strangely excited, and Pearle was perfectly colorless, as she hugged Amy almost convulsively to her.

All had been so deeply interested in the above conversation that no one had noticed that Mrs. Murdock had en-

tered the room almost at the beginning of it, and had left the door through which she had entered open.

No one noticed now the slight figure in a dainty white wrapper, with face and lips as hueless as the spotless cambric, that glided noiselessly into the room.

It was Alice Renau, and no one seemed conscious of her presence until she approached the spot where Sir Harold and Adison Cheetham stood, and, confronting the latter, said, in tones which penetrated the farthest corner of that large room :

"I am Alice Renau—I am your wife!"

CHAPTER XLV.

"I THOUGHT SHE WAS DEAD."

A terrible silence pervaded the room for a few moments after those thrilling words ; then every one became strangely excited.

Adison Cheetham uttered a hoarse, affrighted cry, and sank trembling into a chair, looking as if he had seen a spirit from another world.

Dr. Murdock threw out his hands with an appealing gesture and then reeled where he stood, as if some one had struck him a deadly blow. His mother alone saw it, but too well she knew what it meant, and her heart ached for the hopes so ruthlessly blighted.

"That story is told," Pearle murmured, and kissing Amy, with trembling lips and sad eyes, as if the thought of consigning her to such a father was more than she could bear.

Then lifting her face to Richard, a smile broke over it, like a gleam of sunlight through the clouds.

"It is all over," she said, leaning her head trustfully against his arm.

"What is all over, my darling?"

"The misery and pain—the loneliness and exile," she answered, with a sob of joy.

"Do you know her?—who is she?" Richard asked, pointing to Alice, and as much surprised at her appearance as any one.

"Yes, she is Amy's mother; don't you remember I told Sir Harold that I feared I should have to lose the child? It was because we had found the mother."

"How was she lost—what had happened to her?" Richard asked, eagerly.

"She was supposed to be dead—killed in a railway accident."

"Ha!" he cried, with a start, and bending a peculiar glance upon Adison Cheetham.

Sir Harold's face was a perfect blank for the space of a minute, then, with an effort to recover himself, he gently laid his hand upon Alice's shoulder and asked:

"My dear, is it possible that you are Alice Renau?"

"My name, for nearly seven years, has been Alice Cheetham," she said, with a scornful curl of her delicate lip; "but," she added, sadly, "I was once so happy as to bear that of Alice Renau."

"Then I have at last found the one for whom I have been searching," the baronet said, smiling.

"Yes, I heard you say something about it, while I stood listening in the next room; but I don't quite understand it," she answered, with a puzzled expression.

"Your father's name was Jean Renau?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And he was the brother of Pierre Renau?"

"I knew papa had a brother of that name, although I never saw him," Alice answered, absently, while her troubled glance wandered to the miserable, cowering wretch whom she had so suddenly confronted and claimed as her husband, thus upsetting in an instant all his vile schemes regarding Pearle.

"Then," continued Sir Harold, "you are cousin to my wife, who was the only child of Pierre Renau."

Alice looked up at him now, something of interest shining in her eyes.

"Then you must be Sir Harold Cheswick! I have heard of you," she said.

"Yes, I am that individual, and I have been wanting to find you, in order to get rid of a fortune which rightly belongs to you," he said, smiling again.

"I heard you say so; but I don't understand it," Alice answered, with a sigh, as if there were matters that troubled her more, just now, than the want of a fortune.

"I will explain," Sir Harold replied; "my wife died some time before her father, your uncle, and he, knowing that I and my child had plenty of the world's goods, made a will dividing his property equally between his brothers, Alec and Jean. Both, however, are dead, and you alone live to inherit all. I have been told that Alec Renau returned from Australia with a handsome property; is it true?"

"Yes. Uncle Alec was quite rich, and he left everything to me," Alice answered.

"I am very glad that I have found you at last; but is this man indeed your husband?" Sir Harold asked, with a gesture toward Adison Cheetham.

She sighed heavily at the question.

"Yes, we were married in a little church in Bar le Duc nearly seven years ago. I never would have owned it, I never would have come into his presence," she went on, wearily, "but I heard his voice when Mrs. Murdock opened the door. I knew it at once, though I had not heard it for so long. I heard him trying to prove that I was dead, and I knew that it must be to carry out some evil design of his own. I could not hear enough to understand what he wanted to do, but I resolved that he should never deceive any one again as he had deceived me—he should never make any one as miserable as he has made me—and that was why I came into the room."

"And what have you to say for yourself now, sir?" demanded Sir Harold, sternly, and turning to the wretched husband, whose face was as white as his wife's wrapper.

"I—I *thought* she was dead," he stammered, too thoroughly unnerved to even attempt to deny that the woman before him was his wife.

"Well, you see she is not," Sir Harold said, impatiently.

"But—but I swear that I *saw* her dead! Upon my oath, I believed her dead and buried!" he murmured, with white lips.

"*When* did you see her dead?" cried Richard Byrnhelm, eagerly, and now coming forward.

Adison Cheetham shifted uncomfortably in his chair, and glanced uneasily at Pearle.

"*When* did you see her dead?" Richard repeated, with lowering brow.

"I saw her—I—there was a railway accident a long time ago. I was on the train. Some one had been killed—a woman, they said. I went to look at her, and, by

Heaven! as sure as I am a living man, it was my wife who was killed!" he said, greatly excited, while he kept glancing nervously into Alice's pure, beautiful face, an expression of awe on his own.

His teeth chattered, and the perspiration stood thick upon his forehead.

"It was I who was *supposed* to have been killed at that time," Alice began, but Richard interrupted.

"Yes, I know you believed she was killed," he said, in a choking voice, "for when you looked upon her you cried out, involuntarily, 'My God! how came she here?'"

Adison Cheetham glanced up at him in surprise, while his white face suddenly reddened to the roots of his hair.

"You look surprised," Richard continued, with bitter sarcasm; "and well you may, for I was on that train also, although I did not know that you were traveling with me until I happened to come up behind you as you stood looking at that unfortunate girl, and heard you cry out as you did. I was the only one who knew where the cry came from, and I was at once convinced that there was some mystery in your life connected with that young and beautiful woman, and I resolved to watch you. I heard what you said to your valet on leaving the train in London. I followed you to your hotel, and from there, the next day, *to the morgue*, where you went to assure yourself that you had not been deceived."

Richard paused an instant, and his brow grew fearfully dark, as he resumed:

"You *knew then* that she was your wife. You may have believed up to that time that she had died of small-pox, as you assert; but you were convinced *then* that she had been living up to the time of that accident, and that did not occur until more than a week after your marriage

with Miss Radcliffe ; consequently you knew that that ceremony was nothing but a mockery, and you had no legal claim upon her. You have dared to persecute her during all this time—you have dared to seek her ruin by trying to make her assume a position as loathsome to her as it was sinful in the sight of God and man. *How* will you answer for all this, sir?"

The man cowered almost abjectly beneath the force of his passion ; the stern, sharp words seemed to cut him like a knife.

"I thought—as—as long as—she," pointing his shaking finger at Alice, "was really dead, that—no one would ever know, and—and——"

"And *what?*" thundered Richard.

"*I loved her so!*" the wretch whispered, hoarsely, while his despairing eyes sought Pearle's lovely face.

There could be no doubt of the truth of what he said ; his look, his tone, his despair all told of the deathless love that was consuming him, and notwithstanding all that Richard Byrnholm had suffered at his hands, a feeling of pity swept through his heart as he comprehended it.

"It was a strangely selfish love, methinks, that could thus seek the ruin of its object," was his scornful reply, as he turned in disgust from him whom he had once honored as his friend, and went back to his post by Pearle's side.

"It seems to me that things have been strangely mixed up," said Sir Harold. Then turning to Alice, he continued : "Would you be willing to tell us about your marriage with this man, and how you came to be separated from him? I doubt not, it will be painful for you to speak of it, but we are all your friends, and I confess there are some things that I do not quite understand even yet."

"Yes, monsieur, I will tell you, and I think an expla-

nation is due others who have been so kind to me," Alice returned, tremulously, as her eyes sought Dr. Murdock's face.

He started as he met her glance, and a spasm of pain contracted his forehead, but he grasped a chair, and rolling it forward, he said :

"Sit here ; you are not strong enough to stand," and every one noticed the deathly whiteness of his face, and the wildness of his eyes as he glanced from the fair young wife to the man whom she had acknowledged as her husband.

He then withdrew to a remote corner of the room, where, with arms tightly folded across his chest, and his head bent low upon his breast, he listened to the strange tale of wrong and suffering that followed.

Sir Harold seated himself near his relative, and Amy, stealing softly forward, crept into her mother's arms, where she was folded to her heart with a sweet, tremulous smile, which told that in spite of the bitterness of the past, there yet remained a ray of comfort to her.

"I was sixteen years old," she began, "when one summer's day, as I was going from my home to the town, I met a stranger. There was something about him that strangely attracted me from the first. He saluted me courteously, and inquired the way to some place farther on. I directed him, and he left me, and I gave the circumstance no thought beyond mentally remarking upon his fine appearance. If I had never seen him again, all would have been well, but after that, wherever I went I met him ; it always happened, as if by chance, but he afterward told me that he was pleased with me, and sought me continually.

"One day I met him at a *fête*, where he waited upon me and danced with me several times, and our acquaint-

ance progressed rapidly after that. In two months I was betrothed to him, and he wanted me to go away with him and be privately married; but this I resisted for a long time. I did not like the idea of a secret marriage. I had heard of so many young girls who had been wronged and deceived in that way. I asked him why he did not go to my father and openly ask for me, if his intentions were honorable; but his excuse was that he was poor—he was still at school, and he did not wish his companions to know that he had a wife. If I would only marry him, and he could have that as an incentive to work, he would win such a place for me in the world, when he had completed his education, that I should be proud of. I told him I would wait. I would be faithful until he could come and ask me of my father, but he would not listen to me—I must marry him then or not at all, and go away with him without saying anything to any one.

“At last, after thinking the matter all over, I told him if he would marry me in church as a pure and honorable woman should be wedded, I would consent, and agree to keep the matter a secret until he should get through his course of study. It did not please him very well to have the ceremony quite so public, but we went one day to a little church in Bar le Duc, and were married by the cure, and the ring was put upon my finger. But when the book was brought my husband did not wish to have our names written there; it would not matter, he said. I insisted, however, and with a rather stern face he wrote his, and I signed mine underneath. We then went to a quiet little town where we spent a happy month.

“At the end of that time my husband said he must return to his school, and I must remain where I was until he had another holiday. I would have been glad to go

back to my home, tell my father what I had done, and ask his forgiveness; but this my husband would not consent to, so I lived quietly where I was, until the next summer, when he returned to me, and soon after my baby, this child, Amy, was born."

"Then she *is* our child—this *is* our little girl?" Adison Cheetham said, leaning eagerly forward, and peering into Amy's face.

The child shrank from him with a scowl, while Alice bowed her head in answer to his question.

"I thought it—I mistrusted it long ago," he muttered, under his breath, as he sank back to his former position.

"My baby was nearly six months old, when, one day, we read in a paper a notice of my father's death," Alice continued, in a tremulous voice; "then my husband told me I could go home if I liked.

" 'You will be an heiress now; you will inherit all the property,' he said, with more eagerness than I had ever seen him manifest.

"An heiress! the property!' I cried in astonishment, for I had supposed that he knew how very poor we had been for a long time.

" 'Why, your father was very rich—a sort of miser, was he not?—and you will have all his wealth now,' he answered.

"Then I understood what he meant. There had been a story afloat one while that there was a great deal of money in the Renau family—everybody knew that papa's brother in Paris was very rich, and naturally thought that papa must have as much, but being of a miserly turn tried to conceal the fact from every one; and it seems my husband had heard this story and believed it.

" 'No, we have never been rich,' I told him; 'we have

been very poor for many years, for papa's health was delicate, and he could not attend to the estate properly, and that, being our sole dependence, had run to waste.'

"Then he was very angry with me.

" 'I have been deceived,' he said; 'they told me that Monsieur Renau was very rich and a miser, and that at his death you, his only child, would have all the gold he has been hiding for many years.'

" 'It was a great mistake,' I told him, 'there was nothing to inherit save the impoverished estates; papa was not a miser, and if he had been there was nothing for him to hide. He had managed to give me a good education by sending me to a convent at Chalons for two or three years, but it was a hard matter for us to get sufficient to eat and to clothe us decently, for papa was much too proud to ask aid from even his brother in Paris, who never so much as came to see him.'

"Then my husband swore he had been basely deceived by every one, and included me in his displeasure, and from that time his manner changed entirely; he began to abuse and neglect me in many ways. My eyes were opened; I saw him as he was; he had won me and married me simply because he expected to become rich through me, and that hope taken from him he became a selfish tyrant—almost a *fiend*. I bore it as long as I could for my child's sake, and because my pride forbade me going back to the dear ones whom I had so wronged. I bore it till every bit of love for him died out of my heart, and then in despair I took my baby and went home to my mother. She told me that my father never held up his head after I went away; he believed I had been tempted and ruined, and he just grieved himself to death; but he forgave me when he was dying, and left me his blessing if I should ever come

back. For a time it seemed as if my own heart would break with my own trouble, and the knowledge of all the grief I had caused. I saw no one, and no one came to see me; everybody believed I had been deceived and betrayed, and I was too miserable to care anything about it, or to contradict the story, and so my mother, baby, and I, lived a quiet, almost isolated, life, until Uncle Alec suddenly returned to us."

CHAPTER XLVI.

AVENGED.

"He—my uncle," Alice continued, "had many plans for us. He would restore the estate, he would repair the *chateau*, refurnish it, and make it more beautiful than it had ever been. My mother and I should have everything we wished; we should travel and see the world, and, in fact, there was nothing which he would not do for us, for he had no family of his own, no home, no friends save ourselves. I told him my sad story, and he was very tender and pitiful with me. He said he would take care of me, and my false husband should never trouble me; and I, being of a cheerful disposition naturally, began to feel as if there might be some pleasure remaining for me, in spite of my misfortunes. But Uncle Alec had only been with us a few weeks when he was suddenly attacked with small-pox. As soon as he discovered what the nature of his disease was, he refused to have any member of the family come near him; he hired a professional nurse, and

neither my mother nor I ever saw him again. During his sickness he made his will, giving me everything he had, with the proviso that not one *sou* was ever to go to enrich the man who had so deceived and abused me; and thus my mother and I were shielded in the future from the pangs of poverty and want which we had suffered in the past. But my home, where I had once been so happy as a free-hearted, innocent girl, had become hateful to me. Although a lawful wife, yet I could never be honored as such, situated as I was; my child would grow up to be wounded and taunted with never having known a father's love and care, and I determined to leave the place forever, and tell no one whither I was going.

"After considering the matter, my mother and I decided to leave France entirely and go to England, where no one would know us, and where we could live quietly, and with no fear of any one ever reminding us of our troubles. We went to London, where I soon found a small villa in the extreme suburbs, which so pleased me that I hired it, and made for ourselves a quiet, pretty home. We lived there, unmolested and contented, for more than two years, when my mother was suddenly taken ill, and a long sickness followed. I gave her every care, and she finally began to mend; but I could see that her constitution was broken, and that she would never be the same woman that she had been; still, I hoped to keep her with me for many years.

"We had made no acquaintances during our sojourn there, for I shrank from coming in contact with strangers. I was morbidly sensitive over the fact of having a husband and yet living separate from him, and I could not bear to subject myself to inquiries regarding the matter. I had resumed my maiden name, and every one supposed that I

was a son's wife. Though we made no friends, there were some few people living a mile or so from us in whom I became quite interested, and whose destitute condition I had noticed during some of my walks about the country. One of the children of a very poor family had been very sick while my mother was ill, and as soon as she was able to be left, I one day went to see them, and ascertain what I could do to relieve their condition. I found them, as I expected, in great need, and very grateful for the basket of dainties which I took for the sick one, and for the money which I left with the woman. It was quite late in the afternoon when I had started on my errand, and by the time I was ready to return, it was growing dusk. I feared I should not be able to reach home before dark, and in order to shorten the distance, I determined to take the railway track."

The frail girl paused a moment as she spoke of this, and her white face grew whiter still, while a horrible thrill seemed to pervade every one in that silent room as they realized what was to follow.

"The railway," she began, with a visible shudder, "curves very abruptly just at that point, but I took what I supposed was the track on which the outward-bound train ran; and deeming myself perfectly safe, since I thought I was sure to see a train if one should come, I walked slowly toward home, and unconsciously fell to musing. I do not know exactly when I began to be conscious of my danger. I heard a whistle behind me, but I was so sure that I was upon the right track that I did not pay much heed to it. I glanced up, but there was no train ahead of me, and so I walked leisurely on. Then those short, sharp whistles, those dreadful warning sounds, seemed to come from just behind me, and thrilled me to

my soul with a terrible fear. I turned—the train was almost upon me. My blood suddenly froze in my veins; I seemed to become paralyzed and deprived of the power to move. On and on that fearful engine thundered. I thought of my child, my mother—I shrieked a prayer to God for mercy, and then I was conscious of nothing that followed."

Alice was shivering now with the terrible remembrance; her teeth chattered, her lips were blue, her eyes had grown wild and staring, and poor little affrighted Amy clung to her in terror.

"This will not do," muttered Dr. Murdock, with a gloomy brow; and springing to his feet, he suddenly left the room.

He was gone but a moment, however, and returned with a glass of something in his hand. He went to Alice's side, and held it to her lips.

"Drink it all, May," he whispered, unconsciously using the name by which he had always addressed her.

She obeyed him mechanically, and then lay back, weak and exhausted. The recollection of those sad events had been almost too much for her frail strength.

"Come and rest; you are not strong enough for all this excitement," the young doctor urged, with an anxious glance into her pallid face.

She looked up at him sadly, and shook her head.

"I must settle with *him* first," she said, with a motion of her head toward her husband.

The color mounted quickly to George Murdock's face, and he turned abruptly from her and walked back to his corner.

"What a fearful experience has been yours!" exclaimed

Sir Harold, with a sympathizing look. "But whatever prevented you from being crushed to death?"

"I do not know. I expected to be hurled instantly into eternity; and indeed life has been a blank to me for more than a year, for I have known nothing since, until within the last week," she replied, weakly.

"It is the greatest mystery in the world," said Richard. "I cannot understand how she has been preserved. The engineer said he saw her immediately upon rounding the curve, and instantly reversed the engine and gave the signal for danger ahead. He used every effort to stop the train, and most of it was spent before it reached her. Some thought she was caught upon the cow-catcher and thrown clear from the track, or she would have been crushed. Everybody thought that life was extinct; indeed, a physician said that she was dead, although no outward injuries that appeared very serious could be discovered. While the crowd was standing about her and speculating as to who she could be, I pushed by several people in order to get a nearer view, and as I did so, some one just in front of me uttered that cry of which I have already spoken. In an instant I looked up, and saw who it was who had spoken those words. Others heard them also, but no one else appeared to know whence they came, although the conductor made inquiries, hoping to discover who the unfortunate one was. But he never made another sign; but I, watching him as he went back to his seat in the carriage, saw him totter and grope his way like a drunken man. I determined to watch him. He had evidently made some strange and startling discovery, and a wild hope came to me that there might be some secret in his life that would prove he had no legal claim upon Miss Radcliffe. Since his treachery toward me I was willing to believe almost

anything of him. As I have already told him, I followed him to his hotel, kept watch of his movements there, and tracked him the next day to the morgue. I heard the eager questions which he put to the official in charge, and I shall never forget the look on his face when he was told that the body had been claimed and taken away. I also made inquiries after he had gone, hoping to discover who the girl was; but the man said that he knew nothing; a young gentleman—the woman's husband in all probability—had come early that morning and removed the body. I kept watch of Adison Cheetham for awhile, hoping to gain some clew to the mystery of his strange emotion, but did not succeed, and finally gave up the chase. I have often thought of that sad accident, and wondered who the poor unfortunate one could have been, but never learned until this hour."

"Who saved her? Who took her from the—that place where they took her?" Sir Harold asked, glancing around the room.

"I, sir. I would rather my patient had not been harassed with all these sad details in her present weak state," George Murdock said, rising, and turning his set, gloomy face toward his questioner, "but undoubtedly she would have learned them some time, and perhaps it will be just as well to canvass the whole matter once for all."

He then went on to tell the baronet the same story that he had already told Pearle.

Every one was intensely interested, and when he had concluded Sir Harold went to him and took him warmly by the hand.

"You deserve great credit, and you have my warmest gratitude for your prompt action in this matter," he said, heartily, adding: "And as for your tender care of the poor

stranger during all the long months of her unconsciousness, I have no words adequate to express my appreciation and admiration for both yourself and your mother. You have performed a deed over which angels might well rejoice. God bless you, my young friend, and you also, my dear madam," and Sir Harold's fine eyes were full of tears as he shook them both by the hand.

Pearle's experience with Madam Renau and little Amy was now rehearsed, that he and Richard might understand all the links in this strange story. She told him also of her engagement with Lady Fennelsea, her encounter with Adison Cheetham while she was among the hills of Scotland, and of Lord Fennelsea's brave defense. She related how he had followed her hither, and enlisted her ladyship's influence against her, and how she had indignantly dismissed her from her service, refusing her the protection she had craved until she could communicate with her friends, and thus she had been driven to seek shelter and security with Dr. Murdock and his mother.

And thus the whole story was made plain to everybody at last.

When Alice understood all that Pearle had suffered from the persecution of the man whom she was forced to acknowledge as her husband, she was deeply moved.

She arose from her chair when she had concluded her recital, and going to Pearle's side, she bent down, put both arms around her, and kissed her with trembling lips.

"How glad I am for you that you are free from him," she whispered; "how much you must have suffered, and how nearly he succeeded in ruining your life, as he has ruined mine! and to think that through it all you have been the guardian of his child!"

"But, Alice, dear, I did not *know* that Amy was his

child, so there is no merit in my having cared for her—at least in the way you mean,” Pearle answered, returning her caress.

“No, you did not know it, and I’m glad you did not, for both your sake and hers, but you know it now—I—I hope it will not change your feelings toward either her or —me,” Alice said, with a wistful look into Pearle’s fair face.

“Dear child,” Pearle answered, with a tremulous smile, while with her well hand she drew Alice’s head down to her shoulder, “do not allow such a thought ever to trouble you. Amy is as dear to me at this moment as she has ever been, and you—I have begun to look upon you almost as a dear sister; because you happen to be connected with *him* cannot in any way affect my regard for you.”

“How you comfort me! And yet I have a sort of guilty feeling, for if I had not left him, if I had borne all and asserted my position as his wife, if I had not hidden myself from everybody, all this trouble and suffering would never have come to you,” Alice replied, sadly.

“Never mind that now, dear. God has taken care of me through it all—indeed, through my trouble He has led me to trust Him, and, Alice, I feel that I am better prepared for the life that is before me for having passed through these deep waters.”

Sir Harold had approached Adison Cheetham while these two fair women were conversing thus.

The wretch had sat silent and moody, and listening to the strange stories that were being related in no enviable frame of mind.

The man had sinned deeply, and ~~he~~ had also suffered deeply. He had fully believed that Alice Renau was dead. When she had left him, driven from him by his abuse and neglect, he had gone home to his own estate, where he re-

mained in ignorance of all concerning her, and glad, if the truth were known, to be rid of his "beggar wife," as he had more than once called her, after learning of her poverty. He had remained there, I say, in ignorance of all concerning her, until chance threw in his way a newspaper containing, as he supposed, the notice of her death.

To say that he was glad but faintly expresses his feelings; he was exultant, for now he was free, and could woo and win a rich bride, and he was very sure he would not be fooled a second time.

That notice was the little slip of paper that he had taken from his wallet and read, after his first advances to Pearle in the grove on the day of the picnic; it was also the same slip that he had read in his room at the Langham Hotel, but he read it under very different circumstances then, for, had he not only a few hours before looked upon the dead face of his wife?

It was a terrible shock to him when he saw her lying there so still and white. He knew her at a glance, and those words, "My God! how came she here!" were wrung from him with an agony such as he had never experienced in his life before. In an instant it flashed upon him that Pearle was not his wife—that marriage had been no marriage, and that she was free to wed Richard Byrnholm if she chose. The fact that his wife was really dead at last made no difference; she had died more than a week too late; and then he began to wonder how that notice had come to be inserted in the paper. The only way in which he could account for it was, that Alice, wishing him to believe her dead, had caused it to be inserted, so that he would never seek or trouble her. Then he wondered how she came to be in England, if her father, and her mother, and her child were with her, and if so, where were they living. It

was a very wretched night that he spent at the Langham, and before morning he had almost reasoned himself into the belief or hope that the dead woman was not his wife after all. But to make sure, he had gone to the morgue, hoping to look once more upon that fearfully familiar face. But when told that a young man had taken the body he was more perplexed than ever, and no one can describe the fear and horror that possessed him as he returned to his room. Once there he grew desperate again, and he swore within himself that he would never relinquish his hold upon Pearle Radcliffe—he would not be baffled thus.

No one knew that he had been married; no one should *ever* know it. His wife was really dead now, there could be no disputing it, for hundreds who had looked upon her said that she was dead. No one would ever know—even if it should ever be discovered that she had been his wife—but what she had really died as that notice stated, and he resolved that he would continue his pursuit of Pearle, and claim her as his wife in the face of all. Richard Byrnholm should never triumph over him while he had life to thwart him. And so he relentlessly continued his search for her.

The first time that he had seen his child that day by the roadside he had been struck with her exceeding beauty, but he had not dreamed of the tie existing between them. The next time he saw her in that little arbor on the mountain in Scotland, and heard her name, “Amy,” something in the sound, and in those great blue eyes fixed in terror on him, transfixed him.

Those eyes were very like Alice’s in expression when he had been wont to abuse her. When Pearle had told him her mother was dead, and she had adopted her, something of the truth dawned upon his mind, and that was why he was so eager to have her “take the child,” and come with

him. The idea had grown the more he thought about it, and when he came to France in search of Pearle, he had been almost as eager to gain possession of his child—as he hoped Amy would prove to be—as he was of Pearle. The night of the fire he had almost gloried in the danger that surrounded her.

“I shall save her, and then she will *owe* me her life,” he had said, exultingly, as he bounded up the ladder to her rescue.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A FEARFUL RETRIBUTION.

But his heart sank like lead in his bosom when she told him that she would not leave the place until both her companions were safe. He feared he could not save them all; there was hardly a human being living who was strong enough to scale that dizzy height three times and bear away such a burden each time. But he swore he would do it, for no other must save the woman he loved; to him alone she must owe her life, and then she would not dare deny him the reward he should demand.

He had accomplished the feat—he had been a hero in the eyes of every one who saw him perform the act; but how different was the result from what he had hoped! Instead of glory and honor for the deed, he was now sitting there, crushed and humiliated, before the two women whom he had wronged and the foe whom he hated.

It was not a comfortable or pleasant position to be in, to say the least.

Pearle never had looked so lovely to him before, despite the lines of suffering which were still visible in her face; she had never been more eagerly coveted.

But his long-suffering wife had, as it were, suddenly risen from the dead to confront and denounce him; his child, too, with her clear, grave eyes, from which there looked forth such unconscious rebuke, seemed to condemn him, and a strange thrill pierced his heart as he remembered how she had always instinctively shrank from him, as if, with her childish intuition, she had divined his natural baseness and treachery. She would never love him now, nor look up to him with a child's affection and respect. His wife, beautiful almost as Pearle, and very rich now, despised him; he read it in the cold, hard tones of her voice, in the curl of her delicate lips, in her averted glance, and he could never hope to reap any comfort or benefit through her.

Richard Byrnholm, once his strong, true friend, so loathed him that he did not deem him even worthy a thought of revenge—he had turned his back upon him, resolved to ignore utterly one who had fallen so low; and there was not a person in that room who did not regard him as a Pariah among men.

Surely his humiliation was complete; no foe could be more utterly conquered, and Pearle was amply avenged.

When Sir Harold Cheswick approached Adison Cheetham, he looked up with a sullen, half-defiant air.

"Are you satisfied now that your claim upon Miss Radcliffe is null and void?" the baronet asked, sternly.

"It appears to be a self-evident fact," he answered, with sarcastic bitterness.

"Then I trust you will see the wisdom of discontinuing your persecutions. Miss Radcliffe will return to her home

at Ashton Manor; and, it is safe to assume, that neither she nor Captain Byrnholm ever desire to meet you again."

Adison Cheetham glanced over to where Pearle sat, one hand clasped in her lover's, who was bending fondly over her, while her now radiant face was raised trustfully to his. He clenched his hands, and his face grew almost purple, for the sight maddened him. He swore savagely under his breath, and then said aloud, with a malignant scowl:

"It is well for his future that I did not know all these facts *before the fire*."

"What difference would it have made?" demanded Sir Harold.

"This difference—that Richard Byrnholm would have had but a mass of charred bones for his bride!" he whispered, hoarsely.

Sir Harold shuddered at the malicious words.

"Was it *you* who saved her?" he asked.

"Yes, I saved her; I saved her. I would have *died* for her—for even one kind word or look from her!" he cried, wildly.

"What is this?" Richard asked, coming quickly forward; while Pearle uttered a startled cry.

"It was he who saved Miss Radcliffe from her peril the other night," Sir Harold explained, indicating Adison Cheetham.

"Do I owe my life to *him*?" Pearle breathed, with a frightened look into the face of the man who had so wronged her.

"Yes, to me. Are you not glad of the boon?—do you regret it coming from such a source?" Adison Cheetham asked, bitterly.

She sank back in her chair with a slight shiver. She

was very glad of her life—once more it looked very bright to her; but she would rather that the obligation rested anywhere else. But the man who had risked so much to save her ought at least receive her gratitude. Could she be grateful to *him*—could she forgive him for all the misery he had caused her?

Richard's face was fearfully pale, as he considered that all his future joy he must owe to his enemy. He stood with downcast eyes and sternly compressed lips, with something of the same feelings which Pearle experienced battling in his heart. When at length he looked up, his glance fell sadly and regretfully upon the man who had betrayed him.

"Adison," he said, and his voice was tremulous with emotion, "you were once my friend, and I loved and honored you as such; you betrayed me, and I had come to feel that I almost hated you; but if it was you who saved those three girls, you have accomplished a truly noble deed; you jeopardized your own life to save them, and surely I must believe that there is some good in you, after all. You have saved *her*—she must have perished but for you—and I am grateful to you. Shall we say that this heroic act cancels the past? I hold out an olive branch to you—shall we part at peace with one another?"

It was a grand nature that could thus rise above the mighty injuries of the past—that could, as he said, thus "hold out an olive branch" to one who had been so deadly an enemy.

They could never be friends again—they must never meet again; but Richard at least would not send him forth with the weight of his hatred resting upon him, to follow and pursue him wherever he went.

It was a hard thing to do, even knowing that to him he

owed Pearle's life and all the happiness that was to be his, through her, in the future ; but afterward he always remembered with thankfulness this effort that he made to forgive him, as we are commanded to forgive those who injure us.

It melted Pearle, who, for the moment, had felt as if it was more than even she could do, and she murmured, brokenly :

"I also forgive the past ; may One greater than I forgive you too."

It was a Christian woman's forgiveness and prayer—a prayer equal to that of the martyr of old—"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."

Once she could not have uttered such pardoning words ; once her soul would have rebelled against any leniency toward one who had blighted her life as this man had done, and no vengeance would have been too swift or terrible to be hurled upon him for his offense.

But the current of her life ~~had~~ changed ; willfulness, pride, and selfishness had given place to gentleness, peace, and goodness ; and her fair, bright future would be molded after a divine pattern that would diffuse beauty and joy wherever she went.

Adison Cheetham sprang to his feet at the words she uttered, as if goaded to madness, and confronted Richard, his face crimson, his eyes blazing hatred and defiance, his hands clenched and raised as if to strike him to the earth.

" 'Part at peace with one another !' " he cried, fiercely. "You proffer *pardon* to me ! Do you think that, after being baffled at every turn—after staking what I have staked, and—lost, that I am going to fawn and cringe at your feet like a whipped cur ? Do you prate to me of *pardon—peace* ? I could grind you to *powder* beneath

my heel, and mock at your agony; I could hurl you into per——”

“Enough!” cried Sir Harold, and interrupting him with a gesture of command; “do not stain your soul more deeply than it is already stained. Richard, do not cast your pearls before swine; he is utterly devoid of manhood; let him alone, let him drop out of your life from this time forth; go your way and forget him if you can. As for you, sir,” he went on, turning again to Adison Cheetham, “I would that you could draw some comfort from the fact of having performed *one* worthy act during your life, but I see that you cannot; and the deed, as performed by you, became an unworthy one, since it was actuated only by the grossest selfishness. Have you no conscience? are you literally without a heart? have you no compunction for your sins? have you no regret for the wrong you have done that fair woman who is your wife?”

“I have not wronged her; it is she who has wronged *me*,” he answered, lifting his head defiantly and confronting the baronet, as Richard turned sadly away and went back to Pearle.

“You reason strangely,” Sir Harold said, with quiet scorn.

“Not so; I honestly believed her to be dead; I never should have dared to seek to win another, had I known her to be living; in that I have not wronged her.”

“No,” answered his companion, his handsome lips curling scornfully; “but you are guilty of even a greater wrong than that, even had it been intentional; you won her love, you made her desert her parents, leave her home; made her sacrifice everything that was dear to her in the world, and gave her nothing in return; you did all this to gratify your selfish greed—that you might possess

the gold which you imagined her father held in his keeping. Look at the wreck which your greed has wrought—have you no sorrow for it? is there no regret in your heart that would prompt you to seek her forgiveness and urge you to make restitution, if such a thing could be possible?”

“There can be no restitution,” Alice said, in low, cold tones.

She had quietly approached during their conversation, and now spoke as one whose mind was made up as to the course she would pursue.

“There can be no restitution,” she repeated; “he cannot restore to me the love and confidence which I once had for and in him; he cannot restore my happy home—happy even though so humble; he cannot restore my father, nor the pride and joy he once experienced in his only child, nor yet the respect and esteem of those with whom I used to mingle. I have nothing left of all that I once held so dear; I have nothing in the world remaining to comfort me save my little child. She is the only link I have left to bind me to life; for her I must live and strive to make the future as bright as may be, and my aim will be to so rear her that her life may not be ruined by a mistake which proved so fatal to her mother.”

“Then you have no desire to return to your husband; you cannot forgive the past, Alice?” Sir Harold asked.

He had been wondering how these two would settle matters.

She made an involuntary gesture of repulsion.

“He does not *desire* my forgiveness; I know him but too well; there is not one regret in his heart for all the wrong he has done me—no love for me, no sorrow for what I have suffered. I am rich since Uncle Alec’s bequest to me. Had he known of that, and that I was living, he

might have returned to me, and tried by smooth words to make me believe that he regretted the past in order that he might have become possessed of my gold. Now you tell me that I am to be richer still, and there may be a feeling of disappointment that he cannot have the benefit of my fortune; he might be willing to tolerate me for the sake of such gain. Do you think, knowing all this, that I have any forgiveness to offer?" she asked, in tones so cold and indifferent that Sir Harold knew that, as far as any regard for her husband was concerned, she was indeed dead to him forever.

And yet he sighed heavily as he looked upon her.

She was very fair and lovely. She looked gentle and tender in spite of the hard, passionless words she had just uttered. She could have made some good man's home a little paradise on earth, and she seemed like one who could have enjoyed to their utmost the blessings and pleasures of a fond husband, a happy home, and bright children.

She heard his sigh, and it seemed to breathe something like reproach for her hardness, for looking up a troubled expression came into her eyes as she continued, wearily :

"I wish him no ill. I have no spirit of revenge, and I would do him no wrong, even in thought; but I know his selfish nature so well that I would not trust my future, nor that of my child's, for a single day in his keeping. I would not forfeit my self-respect by pretending a regard and confidence that I do not feel. I wish to drop out of his life as completely as if I were really dead, as he believed me to be."

Her coldness and indifference seemed to sting the man of whom she was speaking with a keenness which he had never before experienced.

There was something far more attractive about this calm,

self-sustained woman, with her pure, pale face and great dark eyes, than there had been about the gay and happy Alice Renau. There was a quiet dignity about her that impressed him, and the thought *had* come to him, while sitting there, that, with the great wealth that had fallen to her, she would make a lovely mistress at Pelham Pines. Pearle he could not have now. Why not make peace with Alice, and gather what good he could from the inevitable?

How well she had read his nature to Sir Harold, and with what indifference she had repudiated his every claim upon her. It stung him keenly.

"You would not trust your own nor your child's future for a single day with me. How would it seem if I should *take* that child from you? Remember that she is mine as well as yours," he said, savagely, through his set teeth.

Alice caught her breath quickly at his words, but she replied, firmly:

"You never can take my child from me. No court would ever give her to you when once I had told my story. I have not forgotten, *nor have you*"—and here her gentle black eyes blazed with a fire which Sir Harold had not thought her capable of exhibiting, while she faced her husband with a boldness that made him wince—"how once, when I refused to obey one of your brutal behests, and you could not move me by either threats or *blows*, you revenged yourself upon me by seizing my baby from her crib, and abusing her so that she carried the marks upon her tender flesh for a month," and the outraged mother shivered at the remembrance of the deed.

"Perhaps, Mrs. Cheetham, you might desire a divorce?" he sneered, though he was very pale with anger.

"A divorce would not make me more free than I shall be without it," she said, coldly.

"It might perhaps give you the opportunity to marry your soft-hearted doctor, and in that way repay him for his care in the past for his pretty fool."

The words were fearfully malicious, but Adison Cheet-ham had not been unobservant of George Murdock's manner toward his wife, and he had drawn his own conclusions therefrom.

Sir Harold opened his lips to denounce the villain, but Alice proudly interrupted, though a vivid color flamed her cheeks.

"I owe Dr. Murdock a debt of gratitude which I can never repay, and," she added, with a curl of her sweet lips, and a look that cowed him, "he is a man who in every way commands my respect. Now, Sir Harold," she continued, turning to the baronet, "I have done with this remnant of my old life forever, and you are the only one in all the world who is in the remotest degree connected with me. I have no real claim upon you, and yet something in your face tells me that I may come to you in my need. You say that you hold a fortune in trust for me. Will you not take me and my child into your care also? Will you be my protector—my adviser? I am so alone; the world seems such a large—such an empty place to me in my friendlessness—may I rely on you?"

Who could resist the sweet pleader, with her tremulous lips, her pathetic tones, and tearful eyes? Surely not the noble, tender-hearted baronet.

"Yes, my dear child," he said, deeply moved by her petition, "and I am glad to assume the care. The world is almost an empty place to me also, and from this moment I adopt you as my daughter; your little one will be like a sunbeam in my lonely house, and I will be a faithful guardian to you both. And now," he concluded,

turning again to Adison Cheetham, "since this matter has been settled, it is best that this interview should end. But, young man, for your own peace of mind let me urge you to lead a different life in the years to come, from what you have in the past. Remember that a future must come when you will be obliged once more to meet all those whom you have injured; I pray that day will find us, every one, ready to meet the Judge of all the earth."

He took Alice by the hand as he ceased speaking, and led her across the room to Pearle, while Adison Cheetham, a hundred conflicting emotions raging in his heart, staggered from the apartment.

Dr. Murdock was startled by a strange look that came over his face as he went out and shut the door, and sprang up as if to follow him; then, as if suddenly changing his mind, he sank back upon his chair, while his eyes wandered wistfully, yet gloomily, toward the slight figure in white now kneeling by Pearle's chair, with Amy's arms clasping her neck.

The next moment every one in that room was electrified by the sound of a heavy fall, accompanied by a wild cry, and then there came an ominous and dreadful silence. They sprang into the hall to ascertain what had happened.

A thrill of horror pierced each heart, and blanched each face as they bent over the stair railing and looked below. Adison Cheetham lay there a senseless, motionless heap. Blinded by passion, every nerve tingling with the fury that was raging within him over his ignominious defeat, he had taken no heed to his steps, and so rushed recklessly on to his destruction.

A maid had been sweeping the upper hall, but being called away from her work for a few moments, had care-

lessly left her dust pan and brush upon the upper stair, and her broom leaning against the wall.

Adison Cheetham saw the broom—it angered him to see it there, and with an oath and a kick he sent it flying on before him. The dust pan and brush he did not see, and stepped heedlessly down upon the latter; it crushed beneath his weight, and threw him with dreadful force from the top to the bottom of the stairs.

He was taken up insensible and borne to his room, where Dr. Murdock made an examination of his injuries.

One leg was broken in two places, and three ribs upon his right side crushed in upon his lungs. There was a terrible bruise just over one of his temples, and his skull was fractured.

What an immediate and fearful retribution had overtaken the wretched man!

“There is no help for him—he cannot live twelve hours,” Dr. Murdock said, with a face almost as ghastly as that of his unconscious patient. He had been thinking while making his examination: “Am I in any way responsible for this? If I had followed him and spoken to him, as I thought of doing, could I have saved him from his fearful doom?”

Alice Renau, with a wild horror in her eyes, had followed them to her husband’s room, and when the young physician uttered those fatal words, she at once took her place by his bedside.

With trembling fingers she wet a napkin and laid it over that unsightly bruise, and with another began wiping the blood from his face.

Dr. Murdock exclaimed at the act, and anxiously scanning her beautiful face, came to her side, and caught both her hands in his.

"You must not stay here," he said, authoritatively, but with trembling lips.

"Oh, yes, I must," she answered, calmly, but with a weary glance at the distorted face upon the pillow, "he is helpless and suffering, and I am willing to do what I can for him. I—I do not wish him any ill—I really wish he might have been spared to—to be a better man; are you sure you can do nothing to restore him?"

"Nothing; no power on earth can ever restore him," he said, solemnly.

She sighed, while her eyes seemed fixed in a sort of fascinating horror upon that deathly countenance.

"May, look at me," George Murdock said, sternly, and her glance was lifted obediently to him.

"Do you value your recovered reason? Do you wish to save yourself for the sake of your child? If so, you must leave this room at once. You can be of no earthly service here. I will do everything that can be done for him. If I could save his life, God knows I *would* do it, but you—I cannot—I will not let you stay."

Without releasing her hands, without even waiting for her to reply, he led her to Sir Harold, and bade him take her away.

She made no objection, but with one last backward glance at that face fast settling into the rigidity of death, she allowed Sir Harold to lead her from the place, and had looked her last upon the man whom once she had believed she fondly loved, and awoke when it was too late to a knowledge of her error.

Adison Cheetham died that night. In the silence and dreariness of the midnight hour he breathed his last, and the hand of the man he had so deeply injured, whose con-

fidence he had betrayed, whose trust he had abused, closed his eyes in their last long sleep.

"I am glad I did not withhold my pardon," he said, with a feeling of comfort that the last words which he had spoken to the man who had once been his friend had been kind words—that he had not parted angrily with him.

He was gone, he could never injure him more, and there was much of sadness in his heart for a life that had been so misused, and nothing of bitterness for the treachery that had so nearly ruined him.

Sir Harold, with Dr. Murdock and Richard, attended to all that was necessary, and accompanied the mangled body to its home at Pelham Pines, where, after it had been laid to rest beside its kindred, they remained for a day or two to consult with the agent regarding the disposal of the property.

There was no will, and Sir Harold, who considered himself the guardian of little Amy, who of course would inherit her father's property, assumed the control of everything, and then all returned to their friends at Vannes.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

FORGIVENESS BRINGS PEACE.

The day following the departure of Sir Harold and his companion upon their sad errand, Pearle and Alice were sitting in the room of the former, conversing gravely upon the strange events which had so recently occurred.

Both had been shocked and saddened by the horrible accident which had so suddenly hurled into eternity the au-

thor of so much of their trouble and sorrow; but they could not mourn for one in whom there did not appear to be one lovable quality. Even the young wife herself could not experience much of grief at her bereavement—if such it could be called.

Her love for the man—if indeed she had ever really borne him any real love—had died a violent death years before, and while she never would have dared to wish that he might be removed from her path in any such tragic way, yet she knew that she never wanted to look upon his face again—she was glad to be free.

While they were talking of these things a servant entered the room and handed Pearle a note.

Opening it she read, in Lady Fennelsea's handwriting :

"MISS RADCLIFFE :—If I have not offended you beyond all forgiveness, will you kindly grant me an interview?

"Yours, in mingled sorrow and gratitude,

"URSULA FENNELSEA."

Pearle's fair face flushed crimson as she read these strangely humble words from the haughty woman, and then she passed the note to Alice, and turned to look for her pencil to answer it.

It is not to be expected that she could forget Lady Fennelsea's overbearing and unkind treatment of her, nor her haughty, supercilious manner toward her during all the time that she had been a member of her family. She could not forget her sneers and sarcasms, her heartless refusal to protect her from the persecutions of the man she so feared, nor the unfeeling way in which she had dismissed her from her service, thus leaving her alone and utterly friendless in that strange place. But she was not one to shrink from duty.

She had not shrunk from the terrible ordeal which had

so nearly cost her her life, when she had voluntarily chosen to sacrifice herself in order that the worldly woman's daughter might be spared to her; and now she would not withhold from her the comfort of her forgiveness for the past, if she desired it.

She had stood too near death and realized too vividly that life is not given to man for the purpose of considering alone his own selfish feelings and inclinations to waste any portion of what remained in harboring resentment, or a desire to avenge his individual wrongs.

Yes, she could forgive Lady Fennelsea—she could, in her gratitude for the great happiness and blessedness that had been so wonderfully restored to her, even forgive the haughty and disagreeable Camilla for her unparalleled insults and abuse.

“DEAR LADY FENNELSEA,” she wrote, “I shall be very glad to see you, and trust that you will come at your earliest convenience, as I am not yet able to leave my room.

“Very respectfully,

MARGARET RADCLIFFE.”

There was the least gleam of pride in the smile that curved Pearle's lips as she thus signed her own name for the first time for over a year. She gloried in it as she had never done before.

“I never thought I could love it so well,” she said to herself, as she sat thoughtfully contemplating it after she had written it.

Then it gave her such a sense of freedom to write it, making her realize so fully that those hateful shackles which had been so galling to her had dropped from her forever. She no longer need to hide like a fugitive and an outcast; she no longer need to reproach her weak, fond heart, vainly striving to drive out, to crush and trample upon the love that *would* not die.

Oh! it was a blessed freedom—a blissful release after the long and weary bondage she had endured.

For the first time in her life Lady Fennelsea had been brought to see herself as she was.

On that dreadful night, when she had stood safe upon the ground and watched in despair the perilous situation of her daughters, believing that they were surely doomed to a horrible death—when she had seen that noble girl, whom she had treated so ill, firmly reject every offer of escape, putting back the hand that had been outstretched to save her, and giving calm and thoughtful directions for the salvation of *her* children, she had come suddenly to realize her own littleness of soul, the wickedness of her pride, and the cruelty of her nature. And when it was all over, and Pearle was actually saved, and for the first time she was told who her gentle governess was—the daughter of a proud old house, the sister of an earl, a wealthy heiress, and a cultivated, refined lady, whose station was even above her own—she was humbled to the dust.

It was true that Adison Cheetham had told her her name, and that she belonged to a good family, and she had thought that possibly she might be some poor, distant connection of the Earl of Radcliffe; but she had reasoned that the relationship must be very distant, since she, in her pride, could conceive of no lady of station being driven by any necessity into voluntary exile from family, friends, and wealth, and made willing to accept so humble a position as that of governess.

“Why didn’t she tell me that she was Margaret Radcliffe and sister to the earl?” she groaned, with a blush of shame, while talking the matter over with her daughters.

"I would have sympathized with her in her trouble, and shielded her from that man."

"*She* would tell you, mamma, that the fact of her being Miss Radcliffe of Ashton Manor, and an heiress, ought not to gauge in any degree the principle of kinkness which should actuate any one; she would tell you that every governess should be as considerately treated as if she was born to the highest position in the land," answered Francita, who had always admired Pearle exceedingly and laid her precepts to heart.

"Really, Francita, I hope you do not mean mamma to infer that she ought to set her governess in the drawing-room, and treat her like a duchess!" exclaimed Camilla, who, although much subdued and thoroughly ashamed of her treatment of Pearle, was not prepared to adopt quite such radical ideas as these.

"Of course a governess cannot be a duchess, neither is a scullery-maid fitted for the position of a governess. Some are born to serve in the world, and others to be served; but, as far as heart and feelings are concerned, one is entitled to just as much consideration as the other. I don't believe that because you and I were born the children of a lord, our feelings are any finer or tenderer than those of any one who may be employed to serve us. Of course a servant must be made to know and keep his or her place, but no one, according to my ideas, has a right to vent his or her spleen or ill-will upon another, who happens to occupy a humbler position in life," argued Francita, earnestly.

"Francita is right," said her mother, gravely, "and I am glad to hear you express yourself so freely. I have been taught a lesson which, I trust, I shall never forget. Miss Radcliffe has been a lady in every sense of the word

during her residence in our family, and, as such, was entitled to respect and consideration without regard to her birth. I have been overbearing, and, in many instances, unkind to her. Prosperity and pride have made me hard, unfeeling, and selfish," Lady Fennelsea concluded, humbly.

She went to Pearle in this frame of mind, and the gentle girl saw at once that she was sincere.

"You dear, self-sacrificing child," she said, weeping uncontrollably as she saw her bandaged hand and feet, "can you forgive me for the past, and what can I say to prove to you how I honor and bless you? But for your presence of mind, your firmness and decision, and your self-abnegation, one, at least, of my children would have been burned to death. I have no words to express my gratitude—there are no words strong enough."

"You do not need to do or say anything, Lady Fennelsea," Pearle interposed, gently, as she paused. "I know that you are grateful, and I am as thankful as you can be that both Miss Fennelsea and Francita are safe. If I had been rescued and they had perished, I think I never could have known another peaceful moment during all my life."

"Did you expect to be saved?" Lady Fennelsea asked, regarding her earnestly.

"No, I did not," Pearle replied, growing very white at the remembrance of how she had made up her mind to die. "I did not believe there would be time for the man who saved us to go down twice with his burden and come back for me, and I did not believe that his strength would hold out, or that the ladder would sustain him, for it was burning nearly all the time."

"I know," her ladyship said, with a shudder; "but, Miss Radcliffe, did you feel no temptation to leave Camilla behind and save yourself? She has treated you very ill."

She asked it hesitatingly, wonderingly; for she could not even now quite understand the spirit that had prompted her heroism.

Pearle turned to her, a look of surprise in her deep gray eyes, and the slightest possible accent of scorn rang in her tones, as she replied:

"Leave a fainting, helpless girl to perish miserably in those flames! Lady Fennelsea, I *could* not have done it; she was a human being, her life was just as precious as mine, she had no power to help herself. Oh, it would have been cowardly, shameful! and—I *never once thought of the past.*"

"Miss Radcliffe, you are infinitely greater than I, and I have dared to set myself up above you. Can you—*will* you forgive me for my unkindness in the past?" her ladyship asked, in trembling tones, and regarding the beautiful girl almost reverently.

"Most freely," Pearle answered, deeply moved.

"I do not deserve it, but you have taught me a lesson that I shall never forget; you have taught me that, in one sense, every woman is my sister and every man my brother. I trust that the lesson may make me very kind to every one who may serve me in the future," Lady Fennelsea said, humbly.

"I am glad to hear you say that," Pearle returned, with a bright look; "for I think that no lady should ever forget that her servants and dependents have just as tender hearts as she herself has. But we will not dwell upon the unpleasant things of the past, for I have much that will be pleasant to remember, since I have become deeply attached to Francita and the children, and I feel that I have also gained their affections in a measure."

"Indeed you have, and it is very good of you to regard

them so kindly. I do hope, Miss Radcliffe, that you may never know another sorrow as long as you live," said her ladyship, earnestly, and wondering how she could have had this sweet spirit in her family for so long and not learned to love her also.

"Such a wish as that can hardly be fulfilled in this world, but I thank you for it, nevertheless," the fair girl answered, sweetly; "and," she continued, with gentle gravity, "I hope we will all improve our opportunities, so that when the last hour does really come, as we feared it had to some of us the other night, we can meet it with the consciousness of leaving our work well done."

Pearle then changed the subject, and explained something of the trouble that she had been in during her absence from her home, and when she had finished, she said, kindly:

"I hope, Lady Fennelsea, that you will allow Fred and Clara to come to Ashton Manor some day. I think they would enjoy it, for I have some nephews and nieces there who would try to make a visit pleasant for them."

While she was speaking, there had come a timid, trembling knock upon the door, but neither Pearle nor her visitor heard it, and the latter answered:

"It is very gracious of you, Miss Radcliffe, to invite them, and they shall go some time. Now, I have one more favor to ask of you. May Camilla come and see you before you go away?"

Lady Fennelsea put this question with some hesitation, for she knew but too well how deeply her eldest daughter had offended, but she longed to have them at peace.

The words were scarcely uttered, when Camilla herself entered the room.

She had followed her mother hither and knocked twice

for admittance, but no one had heeded her, and when at last she heard her ladyship ask if she might be allowed to come, she could not even wait to hear Pearle's reply. She went straight to her, knelt at her feet, and burying her face in her lap, burst into bitter weeping.

"I could not wait," she sobbed; "I followed **mamma** here; and, oh! Miss Radcliffe, I must tell you how you have broken my proud spirit, and I have come to beg that you will not utterly hate me all your life."

"The world is not all bad," thought Pearle, tearfully; "there is some good in every heart, if one can only get down to it."

She was taken wholly by surprise by this unexpected visit and the attitude of the weeping girl. She had never thought to see the haughty damsel in so humble a mood as this.

She was so moved that she could not reply for a moment, but she lifted the bowed head, and bending forward, gently kissed her on the forehead.

"Let this blot out all unpleasantness between us, Miss Fennelsea," she said. "I have no ill-feeling regarding anything that has transpired in the past, and we will never speak of it again."

Camilla Fennelsea leaned back and looked in astonishment at the beautiful girl who could thus give her the kiss of peace.

"I have behaved shamefully," she said, crimsoning to the roots of her hair, "and—I never said such a thing in my life before to any one—*will you forgive me?*"

Surely the mighty had fallen, the proud brought very low, if this high-spirited girl could sue thus humbly for pardon.

"Freely!" was the only word which Pearle could force her trembling lips to utter.

"I believe you are almost an angel," Camilla said, involuntarily. Then her eyes falling upon Pearle's bandaged hand and arm, she exclaimed, shuddering: "Ah! this poor hand was burned for *me*! Miss Radcliffe, if a year of my life would atone for what you must have suffered, I believe I would willingly give it to you."

Pearle laid her fingers gently on the impulsive girl's lips.

"The years of our life do not belong to us to give to any one, they are 'days of grace' lent us, and during which we are expected to meet our responsibilities. But," she added, speaking more lightly, "my hand, and indeed all my injuries, are improving rapidly, and Dr. Murdock thinks that in time even the scars will disappear, at least from my hand, those upon my feet are deeper. Now tell me if *you* are fully recovered from the shock which you received."

"No," Miss Fennelsea cried, starting up with a wild expression in her eyes, and clasping her hands almost convulsively. "I dream of that dreadful scene continually—I feel that horrible, suffocating sensation—that scorching, wilting, blasting heat—that lurid, blind smoke. Oh! if I could only forget it—if I never need think of it again."

Pearle shivered; it came over her also like this at times, sickening her with the remembrance, making every nerve in her body tingle with horror, and leaving her faint and strengthless as an infant.

But she could not bear to talk of it, and she saw that Camilla was utterly unnerved by the thought of it, so she began talking of something else, gradually winning their minds to more agreeable subjects, and they chatted pleasantly thus for nearly an hour.

"We return to the Priory to-morrow," Lady Fennelsea said, after a while, "our nerves have been so unsettled, to say nothing of the loss of the greater part of our wardrobe, that I think we will all be better off at home for the present. Ambrose will meet us in Paris and escort us from there."

"Please give my kind regards to your son, Lady Fennelsea. I owe him a debt of gratitude, for he once rendered me sufficient service, concerning which he will doubtless tell you himself," Pearle said, with a smile, though a rich color tinged her cheeks as she remembered all that had occurred on that day.

Lady Fennelsea colored also. She had not forgotten her fears that her idolized son might fall in love with the despised governess; an event which she would have been only too proud to sanction now.

But Sir Harold Cheswick had told her something of Miss Radcliffe's romantic history, and she knew that Captain Byrnholm was to bear away the prize which so many had coveted.

Pearle took leave of them in the kindest manner, and referred indirectly to her future prospects, by giving them a cordial invitation to visit her when she would be settled in a home of her own, which her ladyship considered very kind and gracious of her.

In the afternoon, Francita and the younger children paid her a visit which she enjoyed exceedingly, and when night came, and she laid her head upon her pillow, it was with a feeling of sweet satisfaction and thankfulness that she was at peace with all the world.

"Thus blessings ever wait on virtuous deeds,
And though a late, a sure reward succeeds."

CHAPTER XLIX.

NEW-BORN HOPES.

Richard had written almost immediately to the Earl of Radcliffe that Pearle was found, and two days after the events related in the last chapter he had arrived at Vannes, and, with inexpressible thankfulness, clasped his only and dearly beloved sister to his heart once more.

It was almost like receiving the dead back to life again, and, strong man though he was, he bowed his head over her and wept tears of joy.

"How those dear hands have toiled and suffered," he said, kissing them tenderly. "Pearle! oh, Pearle! how *could* you hide yourself from us so?" he added, reproachfully.

"Because I believed I must—that it was best; because I was afraid of all manner of evil from *him* if I remained where any of my friends could communicate with me. I was wild that day, Allstone; oh, it was so hard—so hard, and it seemed almost as if I was accursed in the eyes of all the world, and of Heaven," Pearle sobbed, clinging to him convulsively.

She had kept up bravely until now; but to be clasped once again in her idolized brother's protecting arms, and to realize, as she never had quite realized before, that all the wretchedness was passed, was such a relief, and such a blessed assurance that all was well, that she yielded to the momentary weakness which overcame her, and wept unrestrainedly upon his breast, and confessed all the bitterness of the struggles through which she had passed.

"I tried every way to find you, my darling," he said, tenderly stroking her shining head. "I advertised in all the papers——"

"Yes, I know," she interrupted, smiling through her tears. "I clipped one of those advertisements from a paper and have it now. But what a strange one it was? how happened you to word it in that way—'Lost! A Pearle?'"

"Because I knew that though it might be blind to all the world, yet *you* would understand it if you should see it. If you had but let me know where you were, and what you were doing, I could have borne it better."

"No, you could not, Allstone; you never would have rested, and you would not have allowed me to rest, and it would have been an additional strain upon my heart. But I am so glad that it is all over at last," Pearle sighed, gratefully.

He kissed her lips fondly, saying:

"Yes, dear, and now that I have you once more, I shail *keep* you and guard you very jealously."

"Do not speak with too much assurance regarding property that is not wholly at your disposal," laughed a manly voice behind them, and looking they saw the handsome face of Richard Byrnholm beaming upon them.

"Ah, Richard; I suppose you will claim a share in the prize since you found her. You declared you would, but I must confess I feared you would not succeed," replied the earl.

"I never would have relinquished the search," he answered, with a determined expression, "but I have had a wild goose chase of it as it is, I can assure you; and now having my bird once more in hand, I have no idea in re-

linquishing my hold until I have it properly tamed and caged," he concluded, laughing.

"It will not take long to do that—the taming I mean," replied the earl; "but where did you get your clew to her whereabouts?"

"Well, that is a long story, and I shall have to begin with my meeting with Sir Harold Cheswick," Richard answered, drawing a chair before them and sitting down.

He then related how he had met the baronet, the accident which was the result of it, and the renewal of their friendship, and how he had learned that Miss Melfert, who had been the companion of his child, was his Pearle. He told of their journey to Chalons, their effort to discover the relatives of Sir Harold's wife, their disappointment, their accidental meeting with his cousin Eugene at Bar le Duc, their visit to the little church, and the strange discovery they had there made.

"It was wonderful," Richard said. "When I looked upon the names which Sir Harold had stumbled upon in the register, I could scarcely believe my eyesight. The knowledge that Adison Cheetham had actually been married before he ever saw Pearle, and that in all probability his wife was living, came like a thunderbolt to me. It stunned me. It took away all my strength, and then it made such a savage of me that for the time I craved his heart's blood; for if Alice Renau was living, and we had every reason to believe that she was, he had done two women a deadly wrong; although I knew if we could find that wronged wife, we could prove that Pearle was and always had been free. My joy on that account was short-lived, however, for on going down to Pelham Pines, and confronting him, and charging him with his crime, he was so cool and indifferent, so insufferably insolent, that he

nearly drove me wild. He committed himself to nothing, and though I had a strong hope that something could be proved against him in connection with that woman, whom every one believed to have been killed by the railway train, yet I went away quite discouraged. I can understand now why he was so cool and indifferent. He too believed her dead, and the matter shrouded in such mystery that no one would ever unravel it."

He then went on to explain how they had met young Lord Fennelsea in London, and through him accidentally learned that Pearle was governess in his mother's family, and they had at once hastened to Vannes, where they had arrived the night of the fire.

"What a strange, strange story!" the earl exclaimed, when he had learned all that had transpired during the months of Pearle's absence.

"Yes, it is a romantic one, too, though with much of sadness and misery in it. My darling, are you not glad that it is over?" Richard asked, getting possession of the little hand that lay idly in her lap.

She heaved a little sigh.

"Yes, I hope we have bidden a long farewell to the sadness and misery, but," looking up at him with shining eyes and flushing cheeks, "I don't think I quite like to say that the story is *all told*, 'all over.' Wait until I shall write the sequel for you. You don't know what a race I may lead you yet."

"Pearle, that is like your own bright self once more! How glad you make me!" he cried, bending eagerly toward her, and reading the sweet face, with the little smile of mischief dimpling it.

"When shall we go back to Ashton Manor?" asked the earl.

"To-morrow," Pearle answered, eagerly.

"And the wedding?" whispered Richard.

"No, not to-morrow," she said, with a saucy glance, as she beckoned Alice, who had just entered the room, to come to her.

Ten days had elapsed since the fire, and Pearle's burns were now so nearly healed that Dr. Murdock thought it would be prudent for her to return to Ashton Manor if she desired, and the day was set for, not "to-morrow," but the day after.

No one could know what it cost the young doctor to grant this permission, for he knew that when Pearle went Alice would go also, since she had been invited to go home and remain with her until Sir Harold's residence was ready to receive them.

George Murdock had never dreamed, during his ceaseless, tender care of the unfortunate girl, while in her state of imbecility, that he was growing to love her with all the strength of his great heart, and he probably never would have discovered it if she had remained in that helpless condition. He would have gone on tending her kindly and faithfully, devoting his life to her without a thought that she could ever be anything nearer to him.

But when the light of reason returned to her dark eyes, when her face began to brighten and glow with intelligence, and her manner to change from its helpless dependence to sweet and matronly dignity, tempered with something of reserve, his heart-pulses began to quicken, and he suddenly awoke to a consciousness of his real feeling toward her.

Then the knowledge that she was a wife, and her wretched husband living, came to blight every budding hope within his breast. She could be nothing to him, and

he had loved in vain, and every day in her presence only served to torture him, by showing him how much dearer she was becoming to him.

Then that dreadful accident occurred. Adison Cheetam was dead, and Alice free once more to wed whomsoever she would.

But pride now stung him with its poison-pointed arrows.

She was very rich, and he a poor, struggling doctor would be deemed calculating and presuming if he should seek to win Sir Harold Cheswick's wealthy ward, and so he set a seal upon his heart and lips, and suffered in silence.

Mrs. Murdock saw all this, and it troubled her deeply. She, too, loved the beautiful woman who had been so gentle and patient during her helplessness, as she would have loved a daughter, and it would have comforted her greatly if her noble son could have won her for his wife.

Did Alice herself mistrust this state of things? If the lovely color which crept into her cheeks at the sound of George Murdock's step or voice; if her shyly averted eyes, when she found him regarding her with that mournful, wistful look; if the sudden trembling of her white hand whenever he laid his fingers upon her pulse, were indications that she suspected the great love for her that grew and throbbed in his heart, then signs were not wanting to testify to it.

The morning came at last, on which the party bound for Ashton Manor was to leave; the hour for parting drew near, and Alice sought her friends to say farewell.

"Dear Mrs. Murdock," she said, twining her arms around the good woman's neck, and laying her lips against her cheek, "you have been like a dear mother to me, and I love you more than I can tell you. Will you come and make me a long, long visit when I am settled in

Sir Harold's home? It will not be far for you to come," she added, smiling, "for you will be in London also."

"Yes, my dear, I will come, and I am glad that you will be so near us. But," she added, with a searching look into the fair face, "you will move in a very different circle from that which we frequent—you will have friends who are wealthy, and fashionable, and cultured, to claim your time."

"But *nothing* can ever make those who have been so kind to me during my misfortune less dear to me. Dear Mrs. Murdock, don't imagine that I am going to forget," Alice urged, wistfully, half reproachfully.

Mrs. Murdock tearfully embraced her, and returned her fond caress with an unutterable longing in her heart.

Alice then turned to the young physician, who had stood like some grim statue regarding this leave-taking, and but for the look of misery in his eyes, one could almost have believed him to have been petrified.

She held out both her hands to him; he took them mechanically, and felt them tremble like two frightened birds in his clasp.

"To *you*," she began, in suppressed tones, "I owe a debt that I can never pay; but—but——"

She could not go on. She lifted her tear-laden eyes to his face, and the look which she saw there broke her down completely. She bowed her head upon those strong hands clasping hers—those kind, tender hands that had done so much for her, and burst into passionate weeping.

He shook like a reed at the act.

"May—May—I cannot bear this," he whispered, and grasping both her hands in one of his, he stretched forth his right arm and drew her to him for one brief instant,

murmuring, passionately: "God bless you—God ever bless you, and make your future bright and beautiful."

He touched her forehead with his cold lips, and then released her; but the heart against which she had leaned for that one short moment was bounding with agony and rebellion at this parting.

Did something tell her what he was suffering? Did she, too, regret this separation?

Again she lifted her eyes to his; there was a strange light in them—half defiant, half yearning, and her face was crimson with blushes.

"I should think you were bidding me good-by forever, you are so solemn about it," she said, with a pretty little pout, and an air, an indescribable something, that made his heart bound with a wild, sweet, sudden hope in his bosom. "But," she continued, wiping the tears from her cheeks, which grew redder every moment, "I want you to understand that it is to be for only a very little while. I have no idea of losing sight of my—*dearest* friends."

It was the slightest possible emphasis that she put upon the adjective—but it *was* an emphasis, and it is strange how the burden began to roll from his soul, how the gloom faded from his face, and a glad light came creeping into the eyes fixed so eagerly upon her expressive countenance.

Was it possible that she was holding out a glimmer of hope to him? Had she read his secret, and, understanding the cause of his grief, taken this way to tell him that she was not indifferent to his love?

Her blushes certainly looked like it, her shy, sweet glances, and the little petulant tone in which she had spoken, thrilled him and gave him courage to believe that when a proper time had elapsed he might speak and tell

her how dear she was to him, and she would not turn coldly from him.

"Mamma, mamma, the coach has come," and little Amy, charming in her pretty traveling suit, danced into the room just in time to break a pause that was becoming awkward to all parties.

George Murdock held out his arms to her and she sprang into them, and was hugged with a fervor that made his mother smile.

He must relieve his full heart in some way, and he was thankful to the little sprite for having entered so opportunely, or he might have been betrayed into some unwise and premature expression of his feelings.

He could not feel that it would be right to claim anything just now, remembering that man so lately laid in his grave, notwithstanding Alice's confession that she had neither love nor respect for her husband.

He could wait—the new-born hope in his heart would keep for awhile, and cheer him as he went back once more to his duties.

They were all gone at last ; Pearle, with Alice and Amy, Richard and her brother back to Ashton Manor, where they were all received with rejoicing. George Murdock and his mother returned to his practice and their humble home in London; and Lady Fennelsea with her family to Dunbarton Priory.

Thus the play at Vannes was played out, and all the actors had disappeared from the stage.

How true it is that

" All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players ;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts."

CHAPTER L

PEARLE'S HAPPINESS.

All the world—all Pearle's world—rejoiced and made merry over the escape which their favorite had had from a life of trouble and misery, and looked forward with many hopes and wishes of joy to the time when she should go to reign in that beautiful home which had been prepared for her so long ago.

Nothing had been disturbed at Linden Grange; the beautiful rooms had all been shut up, and the house had been desolate enough, for Richard could not endure to enter the place which he had prepared for his bride with so much of joy and hope, and which afterward had only seemed to mock him with its dreary loveliness.

Now, however, the silent rooms were thrown open once more; the bright glad sunshine shone in at the windows, and danced merrily and invitingly over every beautiful thing that had been placed there by such loving hands; while Richard, his handsome face luminous from his recovered joy, superintended a few little changes and additions, that were to make this home even more beautiful than it was for the lovely bride, who at last was really coming to gladden it with her presence.

Pearle pleaded for a small, quiet wedding this time. "I dread a crowd," she said, with a slight shiver, as she remembered the sea of curious, horror-struck faces which had surrounded her on that day when she left the altar, believing herself the wretched wife of Adison.Cheetham.

So they let her have her way, and only the intimate

friends of the two families were invited to witness the ceremony and to the marriage feast.

"What will you be married in, Pearle?" Alice asked, one day, when such necessary questions as this were up for discussion.

These two victims of a bad man's cupidity and passion had grown very dear to each other. Out of their mutual sorrow and trouble a beautiful friendship was ripening, and no topic was settled by either without the assenting voice of the other.

Alice, or May, as she preferred for some reason to be called now—"My name is Marie, and I like the sound of May," she had said one day when Pearle had, playfully imitating Dr. Murdock's tone, called her by that name, and so they had all gradually adopted it—was blooming into wonderful beauty; every week added a more rounded outline to her cheek, and brought a brighter light to her eye, while ever and anon she might be heard trilling some sweet air to herself as her busy fingers helped to fashion the pretty things her friend was to wear when she gave herself to the man she loved.

"What will you be married in, Pearle?" she had said.

The fair bride-elect grew sober at the question; there was much that was painful about these things, despite her joy. Her bridal this time must not—*should* not resemble in the least that former mockery.

"I will be married in simple white tulle," she said, gravely, after a long and troubled silence; "and, Alice, your own deft fingers shall weave my wreath of nothing more pretentious than white violets and maiden-hair ferns."

"It will be lovely," Alice said.

Her whole heart was in this wedding, and she could not

seem to do enough for the dear girl who had given a mother's care and love to her apparently orphaned child.

And so, three months after her return to Ashton Manor, Pearle Radcliffe went again to the church, and gave herself solemnly and reverently to the man whom she loved.

The old rector's voice was tremulous and husky as he performed the ceremony, but a heartier blessing was never breathed upon a bride than that which he pronounced over Pearle when he had made her the wife of Richard Byrnholm.

A lovelier bride every one admitted they had never seen. There was nothing of the costly magnificence about Pearle's toilet on this occasion that there had been before, but she looked far more beautiful every way.

There was some indescribable charm about her that no one had ever seen before—a sweet and gentle dignity, a calm, deep joy in her glorious eyes, and a beautiful earnestness shining through her whole face that made her exceedingly attractive.

To Richard Byrnholm the day was a very solemn one. He could not, in all his joy, forget that other day when every hope had been so suddenly and ruthlessly crushed out of his life, and, though he had no fears now that anything could rob him of his bride, yet unpleasant memories would force themselves upon him.

He was deathly white until the words were spoken that bound Pearle to him for life, then the unnatural pallor passed, and, as they paused for a moment in the vestry for the registry to be brought, he gathered his wife to his heart, and, laying his lips to hers, murmured:

“At last, my love, at last! God make our lives one long expression of gratitude for this joy.”

Pearle had no bride-maids this time, but the fair maidens who had officiated in that capacity before were all present, even to the croaker, Miss Charlotte Breton, who was Miss Breton still, and with no prospect of becoming anything else.

Gentle Alice Arnaut was instantly attracted toward Alice Renau, who looked very lovely in the finest and whitest of India muslins, garnished with charming little clusters of purple violets; and the two hovered continually about Pearle, their radiant faces testifying to the full sympathy they had with her joy.

George Murdock and his mother were present, as was also Sir Harold Cheswick. His gift to the bride was a magnificent diamond-studded necklace, with a locket containing a life-like likeness of Grace attached.

Lady Fennelsea, too, and all her family were invited; but only her ladyship, with Francita and the two younger children, responded by their presence to the invitation, although Camilla sent her kindest wishes, and joined her mother and sister in testifying their deep gratitude to Miss Radcliffe in an elegant decorated china tea service, delicate and costly enough for a prince.

Pearle ignored everything unpleasant, and treated them in the kindest possible manner; and in after years, when Master Fred led to the altar the curly-haired, black-eyed niece of our heroine, a bond of perfect harmony was cemented between the two families.

There was to be no tour. Pearle said she was weary of wandering, and longed for the rest and quiet of home; and so, after the sumptuous wedding breakfast had been dispatched, Richard Byrnholm took his beautiful bride directly to Linden Grange.

After their departure George Murdock suddenly missed

a presence that had brightened the whole day for him, and, possessed by a spirit of restlessness, he roamed from room to room seeking it.

He could not find what he wished among the guests, and, passing up the grand stairway, he found himself in the wide, handsome corridor, which was used partly as a picture-gallery, and where a large collection of portraits and other paintings hung.

He began to examine these, walking slowly down the hall.

As he drew near an alcove at the end, he thought he saw the flutter of a white dress behind the crimson curtain which hung from the arch.

Something instinctively told him *who* was there. In a moment more he had parted the drapery, and stood in the presence of the woman he sought. She smiled as she said :

"I have been watching the bride and groom on their way home, and wishing all manner of blessings upon them," and she pointed to the carriage slowly winding its way over the distant road ; but the tell-tale blood in her cheeks, and the shy drooping of her lids, told him that she had been watching him also.

"I have been looking for you, May," George Murdock said, gravely.

He could not call her anything but May ; it was the name that he had given her when she was nameless to him, and it was very dear to him.

"For me? Can I do anything for you?" she asked, demurely, while her eyes were fixed on that distant carriage.

He reached down and took her hands.

"Yes ; you can fill my life with happiness," he said, in

low, intense tones. "My darling, I have no words to tell you all that my heart contains for you, but my life *shall live* it, if you will give yourself to me. Can you—will you be my wife?"

She looked up at him with grave sweetness, and said, simply:

"George, I owe my life to you——"

"Nay, dear," he interrupted, with a glad smile, "I cannot take it as the payment of a debt;" but he gathered her into his arms, nevertheless, as he spoke.

"Then I will give it to you freely," she answered, with a sigh of content, as she nestled trustfully to him.

"It is a blessed gift," he whispered, touching his lips to her forehead. Then drawing back, and looking full into her eyes, he continued: "The world will say, May, that I am a fortune-hunter to seek you when I have nothing to offer you save my humble self and, perhaps, a growing reputation. Do you care?"

"No, George, for—I *love you*."

And thus love laid low these most formidable of all barriers—wealth and position.

* * * * *

"Richard, that Mr. Eugene Byrnholm, to whom you introduced me yesterday, is very like you," Pearle said, the morning following her wedding, as they were sitting in their sunny dining-room and chatting over their cozy breakfast.

"He is my cousin, Pearle. And what do you think of his wife?" Richard asked, with a peculiar expression on his handsome face.

"She is lovely. What beautiful hair and eyes she has! I was strangely attracted toward her; and I do not know

how it is, but her voice sounded familiar to me," Pearle returned, musingly.

"Every one admires her; and, Pearle, Eugene's wife is—Ariel!"

A vivid scarlet instantly flashed over the fair bride's face and neck, and tingled even to her delicate finger tips, at this unexpected intelligence.

Richard arose from the table, and going around behind her chair, lifted her face gently, and bending down, kissed her tenderly on the lips.

"I did not mean to startle you so, dear," he said, regretfully; "but come with me to the library, and I will now tell you all Ariel's sad story, and why and how it was that I seemed to be guilty of double dealing."

"No, Richard; there is no need. I have long been ashamed of my suspicions," Pearle began, brokenly.

"Darling, it is right that you should know all about it now; it is a secret no longer—then it was, and I was bound by my word and honor to keep it."

He drew her hand within his arm, and led her to the library. Wheeling a low chair into the bay-window, he placed her in it, and then seating himself upon a hassock at her feet, he began:

"Five years ago my cousin, Eugene, a kind-hearted but wild and impulsive fellow, first met Ariel Arkwright, the beautiful daughter of a retired clergyman. He fell desperately in love with her at once, and she returned his affection. Their courtship was ardent and short, and though Ariel's father strongly opposed the match, they were willful, and were married in less than six months from the time of their first meeting. Ariel's father died shortly afterward—he had long been feeble. She had no mother, no near relatives, and was thus left entirely dependent upon

her somewhat unstable husband. Eugene had no income beyond what his father supplied him. He never applied himself closely to study, and had no profession, and it was a very unwise thing for him to marry. When my uncle discovered what he had done, he was so enraged at his folly and his disrespect toward him in not consulting him upon so important a question, that he stopped his income, and sent him adrift without a penny.

"In his trouble Eugene came to me, asking my advice and assistance, and I promised to aid him if he would agree to forsake all his wild ways, and be faithful to the beautiful wife that he had won. He pledged himself, and I believed him to be sincere. But it was hard work to find a situation such as he was fitted for, and several months passed before any opportunity to earn his living presented itself. At last I learned that a friend was going abroad and desired a clerk. I applied for and succeeded in obtaining the situation ; but the salary was small, though my friend promised to increase it if Eugene proved himself efficient. It was a great trial that he would have to be separated from his wife for a while, but he could not take her, and I told him that I would assume the care of her while he was away. I hired that little cottage which is called the Dove-cote, furnished it for Ariel, and supplied her with a servant. There her little one was born, in less than three months after her husband went away. In the meantime, I discovered that he had been guilty of many indiscretions ; there were debts of honor to be paid, and many other bills were presented, of which he, I suppose, had been ashamed to tell me.

"I felt that money was no object if I could do anything to encourage and help make a man of him, and I paid every one, but kept a strict account of everything, and of

the household expenses at the Dove-cote, in that little book which you saw. The poor child, his wife, so alone and so young, clung to me as if I had been her brother; and, indeed, she was so sweet and lovable, that I was not long in learning to regard her as a dear sister. I went often to see her, and gave her every comfort which I could crowd into the little house; but I had to do all this secretly, for Eugene had made me promise that no one should know where his wife was until he could return and give her a suitable home of her own. He proved himself a valuable and trustworthy clerk; my friend became deeply interested in him, and through his influence Eugene has now obtained a situation in London that renders him independent, and he is as happy as a man need to be, with his lovely wife and beautiful boy, whom they both insisted in calling Richard, out of gratitude to me."

"How simple it all seems, now that I understand it," Pearle said, with a sigh. "Where did your cousin first meet his wife?" she asked, after a moment.

"In France, during one of his wild races over the country. They were living there for the time on account of her father's health, and she and Eugene were married in the very same church where Alice Renau was wedded. Ariel, in some way, lost or destroyed her marriage certificate, and when she found that her husband was returning to England, she wrote, insisting that he should go to Bar le Duc on his way home, and bring her a copy of their marriage record. And so it happened that we met him there, and in that way discovered the record of that other marriage."

"How strange it all seems," said Pearle, meditatively. Then putting her white hands upon her husband's shoulders and bending so that she could look into his face, she continued: "I am proud of my noble husband. Dear

Richard, forgive me for my unreasonable suspicions of you——”

“Hush!” he interrupted, laying his fingers playfully upon her lips. “I do not wonder that you suspected me; a less suspicious person would have believed even worse than you did under the same circumstances. How you must have suffered, my darling, that night when you followed me to the Dove-cote. But let us not dwell upon those days—let us forget the past in the bright present, and what it promises for the future; if we have lost a year, we will try to make the most of those to come.”

“The year has not been *lost*,” Pearle returned, with grave sweetness; “I believe I am far better fitted to be your wife now than I was before our trouble overtook us. If my happiness had been secured then—if everything had been just as we wished, I fear I should have lived selfishly and thoughtlessly all my life. Now I have seen and realized something of the sorrow there is in the world, and the need there is that every one should contribute out of his or her life to brighten that of others. My lesson in adversity has taught me that God, not self, should be first in our hearts, and that to do good and deal kindly with those around us, are duties which we owe to Him.”

Six months after the wedding at Ashton Manor there was another at Sir Harold Cheswick’s residence in Hyde Park Corner, London, where he gave his adopted daughter into the care of George Murdock.

Years have passed since then, and Alice Renau reigns in her elegant home a loved and honored wife.

Her husband has attained fame and reputation as a skillful physician, and is now employed in families where once he would not have dreamed of being allowed to enter.

His mother, a sweet-faced, silver-haired old lady, vibrates between the nursery and the school-room, and is never more content than, when the day is over, she gathers their inmates—a George, a Margaret (pet-named Pearle), and a little Harold, together with the more sedate Amy—around her, to relate some wonderful story of that mystic long ago “when she was young.”

Sir Harold, too, has his bright corner in this pleasant home, and often declares the best investment he ever made was when he adopted his charming daughter upon that eventful day at Vannes.

In Richard Byrnholm's home there is an Alice and an Allstone, but the chief charm of that circle is in the gracious matron whose sweet and self-denying life, whose devotion not only to her own family, but to the interests of all around her, has drawn all hearts to her with a love and reverence that will long outlast the years of her life, and then rise up to call her “blessed.”

THE END.

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